

JAN: AN AFRIKANDER

ANNA HOWARTH

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BY

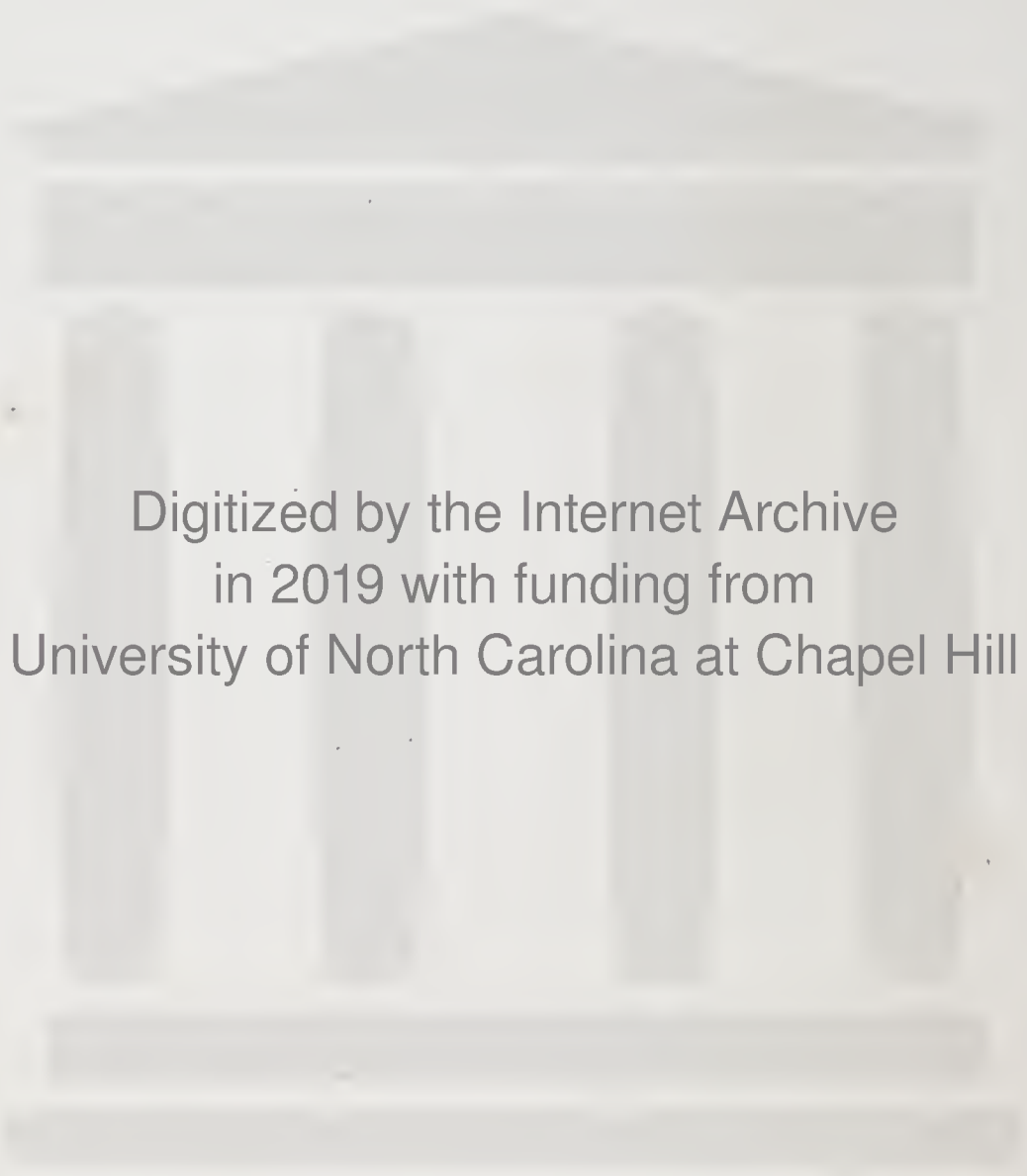
ANNA HOWARTH.

LONDON :

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE,

1897.

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JAN : AN AFRIKANDER.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a still, breathless midsummer night in the end of January, on the southern coast of Africa. The wide, interminable stretches of sand along the shores of Algoa Bay were dark and empty; the air, with its faint salt fragrance, was moist and motionless; the sky was starless; and the only sounds were the long wash of the receding tide and the occasional low mutterings of distant thunder.

At one spot on this lonely shore two women were walking slowly, close to the water's edge. They had left their hotel—a large solitary house standing among the sand-hills—and were seeking beside the waves a coolness which, however, was nowhere to be found. Their faces were turned towards the lights of Port Elizabeth, which were dimly visible through the haze, five miles away.

The two women were mother and daughter; they

strolled along with pleasant alternations of intimate conversation and equally intimate silence. After one of the latter, the daughter said reflectively—

“There were two new-comers at the hotel to-day, both of whom puzzled me rather.”

“I know one,” said her mother—“the young Englishman who sat next to us at dinner.”

“Yes,” replied the girl; “he seems such a curious mixture of exclusiveness and frankness—so very aristocratic and so very unsophisticated.”

“I thought so too,” agreed her mother; “and the other?”

“The other was that lumpish young Dutchman, with surprised eyebrows and an immense upper lip, who kept on looking over his shoulder.”

The elder woman laughed a little at this graphic description.

“He seemed very uneasy,” she observed—“as if he expected some one who did not come. But he went back to Port Elizabeth by the six-o’clock train.”

“Oh, well, he didn’t give the impression of having spent a very happy day,” said her daughter; and then she added, in a lower voice, “Why, I believe here is our young Englishman sitting on the wreck.”

They were approaching the remains of an old wreck, almost buried in the sand, and covered over with

mussels, whelks, barnacles, and sometimes oysters. The slight, well-knit figure of a young man was just visible, seated on the old timber, and facing towards the sea. It was Reginald Carson, the young Englishman of whom the two ladies had been speaking.

As they came up he rose and lifted his cap. In spite of the darkness he recognized them ; he had sat next to them at the table, and had exchanged a few courteous commonplaces with them ; but he did not know their name, nor they his.

They all sat down on the wreck, and made a few remarks about the sultriness of the night and the climate of the South African sea-coast. And then the elder lady said quite easily—

“I think it will be pleasanter if we introduce ourselves. My name is Mrs. Robertson, and this is my daughter May.”

The young man lifted his cap again and bowed. “I am Reginald Carson ; at your service,” he replied—a little stiffly, May thought.

She could not distinguish his features now ; but she had a distinct impression of him as fair and refined looking, with eager grey eyes and a sensitive mouth. His manner was polished, and yet boyish.

Reginald could also recall his two companions. Mrs. Robertson was a fair, small woman, slightly deaf, with

a pleasant, rather serious face, and a very quiet voice. Her daughter May was much taller, upright and graceful, not pretty, but attractive—with the attractiveness of fresh, natural, unspoilt youth. Her clear brown eyes, sweet-tempered mouth, and firm round chin were full of character.

Reginald thought them the most, if not the only, ladylike women in the hotel; but he had had few opportunities of judging of women.

“You have not been very long in the colony, have you, Mr. Carson?” Mrs. Robertson asked.

“About three months only,” he replied. “I came out last October.”

“English people generally come out at the beginning of winter, rather than the beginning of summer,” observed May.

“I dare say it would be pleasanter,” said Reginald; “but I had a particular object in view, and I never thought about the season. Besides, I am strong, and I don’t mind heat.”

“And you get the benefit of the fruit and flowers in the summer-time,” said Mrs. Robertson. “I suppose you combine some pleasure and sight-seeing with your business?”

“Oh yes, I think I have seen a good deal in the short time I have been out,” replied Reginald. He

paused a moment, and then continued, "I think I will tell you the object of my journey. I tell every one I meet, because I never know where I may find the person who can help me."

"If I can be of any service to you, I shall be glad," said Mrs. Robertson, courteously, in a tone betraying neither surprise nor curiosity, though she felt both.

"Thank you," said Reginald. "I will make my story as short as possible. I am looking for some trace of an uncle of mine, who came out here twenty-seven years ago, and has not been heard of for twenty-five years. Every effort has been made to trace him, a great deal of money has been spent on advertisements, police agents, etc., but he has completely disappeared. Now I have come out myself, with the rather forlorn hope of hitting upon some clue that every one else has missed."

"Is his name the same as yours?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"No," said Reginald; "he is my mother's brother. The name is Fairbank."

"Perhaps he changed it," observed May.

"Very likely. And perhaps he left the country and went to Australia or America. And perhaps he is dead. Oh, there are a thousand chances against me."

"Was he married?" asked May.

“Not that we know of,” replied Reginald; “that is another point. If he is dead, and has left children, I must try and find them.”

“You speak as if it was a matter of serious importance?” Mrs. Robertson put the remark as a query.

“Well, it is,” said Reginald; “especially for myself. This is how I am placed. My father died when I was only a year old, and my mother then went back to live with her own father, Sir Richard Fairbank. His only other child was this uncle, my mother’s elder brother. I believe he was wild and dissipated, and once my grandfather threatened to turn him out of the house. So then he said he would not wait to be turned out, and he went off to South Africa. He wrote two or three times from Capetown, but he did not say what he was doing. Then he left off writing altogether, and was never heard of afterwards. My mother fretted about it always—I believe it was as great a grief to her as the loss of my father. She and I have always lived with my grandfather; he had a large property in the west of England. Well, last February he died, and, according to his will, the property is all left to my uncle, who, if he is alive, is now Sir John Fairbank. If he is dead, but has a son, the property goes to that son—if he can be found.”

"There are a great many 'ifs,'" said May.

"Yes," said her mother; "and there is another. If your uncle is dead without issue, the property, I suppose, is yours?"

"Yes; but if I can't arrive at any certainty," said Reginald, "I have to wait five years before taking possession."

"And who looks after it so long?" asked May.

"Oh, I must look after it, of course," said Reginald.

"And my mother still lives in the old house."

"I think we had better be going back," observed Mrs. Robertson, and they all rose and began to stroll homewards along the sands. After a few minutes of silence, the elder lady said—

"Have you nothing at all to help you in your search, Mr. Carson?"

"I have a photograph of my uncle, taken just before he left England; he was only twenty-four years old then. I have heard the name already three times out here, but all the clues have ended in smoke. One took me up to Cradock, where I found a most respectable family grocer—no connection with my mother. Another was a captain of the Salvation Army in Capetown. I found her—it was a woman—preaching from a tub on Saturday night in Water Kant Street, which I am told is one of the most disreputable streets

in Capetown. No connection with my mother either, I am glad to say."

Both the ladies laughed, but May thought to herself—

"If he only knew it, his uncle is just as likely to have been a grocer as anything else, out here."

"The third clue," continued Reginald, "has brought me here. I hear that a boy of the name of Fairbank used to board here, and that the present proprietor of this hotel, Mr. McKinnon, knows him. It seems that this boy, or young man, is gone up to Vryburg; but McKinnon will write to him for me, and I shall stay here until he gets an answer."

"I am afraid you will find it dull," said May.

"It does seem an out-of-the-way place," Reginald agreed; "but I can go into Port Elizabeth every day if I like."

"Mr. Carson," said Mrs. Robertson, presently, "you must take care that you are not imposed upon."

"In what way?" asked Reginald, surprised.

"By people who will pretend to find your uncle for you, and make capital out of it."

"You mean that some one might personate him—like Tichborne," said Reginald. "Well, I really never thought of that."

"Without undertaking such a gigantic fraud as that,"

said Mrs. Robertson, "an ill-disposed person might try to get money from you by professing to help you."

"I suppose he might," said Reginald, evidently reflecting on a totally new idea; "but then, Mrs. Robertson, I must tell people what I am looking for. What other chance have I?"

"You must tell the proper people," she replied—"magistrates, superintendents of police, and so forth. Not every chance stranger. And there is no need to tell any one that there is property at stake."

"That is true," said Reginald; "but I have not told that to every one. And you won't make me suspect *you*, Mrs. Robertson."

They laughed again. May hardly knew whether to despise or to be attracted by his extraordinary simplicity. How could he have been brought up? she wondered. On this point he presently enlightened her.

"I know you are thinking me a great simpleton, Mrs. Robertson," he said, as they turned up the steep sandy path leading to the hotel; "and indeed I think so myself. You see, my mother was so unhappy about her brother—she thought it was going to public school and college that led him into evil ways. She had only me, and she was so terribly afraid that I should grow

up like him. I think that would have killed her. So she never sent me away, but always kept me at home, and had a tutor for me. Of course, the other boys in the neighbourhood all went to school, so that I had no companions, except in the holidays; but I was very happy at home," he added hastily, as if afraid that he had cast some reflection on his mother. "And I was very well taught, too; only, of course, I am ignorant of the world. I had very hard work to persuade my mother to let me come out here alone. She thought I must have some one to look after me."

"You will find it only too easy to dispel your ignorance," said Mrs. Robertson, quietly. "It is better to have too little knowledge of the world than too much."

They had reached the hotel, and stood a moment on the verandah before parting for the night. The air still hung like a wet blanket over the earth, but the muttering of the thunder was nearer. Reginald wished the ladies good evening, and left them.

"What a very unsophisticated young man," said May.

CHAPTER II.

THE Good Hope hotel stood quite alone on a sand-hill facing the sea. The nearest inhabited house was a solitary police-station about a mile away; further away still was a solitary farm. The railway, however, passed within half a mile of the hotel, and there was a siding at the nearest point where any train would stop if the would-be passenger stood on the platform and waved a red flag, provided for the purpose, as soon as the train appeared round the curve. There was a perfectly empty and rather unclean waiting-room at this siding, but no ticket-office or officials of any sort. It was nothing but a siding.

There was a heavy thunder-shower during the night following the incidents recorded in the last chapter, and the world was refreshed thereby. The air was perceptibly lighter, the sober green sea-coast bushes were sprinkled with diamond drops, and the unfathomable sand looked less sandy than usual.

May Robertson was going into Port Elizabeth by the

nine-o'clock train to do some shopping; her mother was disinclined to go, and she went alone.

Reginald, who had no inclination for a whole day on the solitary shore, or sitting on the verandah listening to the ladies' gossip, had decided to go by the same train. He started a few minutes later than Miss Robertson, not knowing that she was going, but his long strides soon brought him up to her. They exchanged a few remarks about the beauty of the morning, and then Reginald asked his companion if she lived in Port Elizabeth.

"Oh no," said May, "we live up-country, on the way to Graaff Reinet. My father has a large farm in what is called the Karoo."

"I have heard of the Karoo," said Reginald. "Isn't it rather a dreary region to live in?"

"*I* don't think so," said May, with a bright smile; "but then, it is my home. I dare say it might seem dreary to English people, because there is no grass or large trees, and water is scarce."

"Don't you call yourselves English people?" said Reginald, rather abruptly.

"Yes, of course, we are—English colonists. And my parents were both born in England. But for the sake of distinction we call people like ourselves colonists, and those who come out from home English people."

Reginald asked some questions about her home, and whether she had brothers and sisters.

“Oh yes, a splendid supply,” laughed May. “I am one of ten. I am the eldest girl; but some of the boys are older than I am. Two of my brothers do not like farming, and they keep a store in Petrusville, a village about eight miles from our farm. They are getting on very well, too.”

Reginald had been long enough in the colony to find out that class distinctions are not as in England, and that gentlemen take to every kind of occupation, and are found behind the counter and in the workshop without undergoing that mysterious process known as “losing caste.” Nevertheless, he was aristocrat to the backbone, and it gave him a disagreeable shock to learn that the pleasant, lady-like girl he was walking with had two brothers who kept a shop. May knew perfectly well that she had shocked him; she had told him the fact with deliberate intention, and mischievously enjoyed the pause that followed.

They were not far from the siding, and were walking leisurely, as they had plenty of time. Between them and the railway ran the high-road into Port Elizabeth; and on this side of the road were two cottages standing together. Reginald asked who lived in them.

“They are quite empty,” replied May. “But in the

summer they are often taken—when the hotel is full—by people who come with a large party. Then, of course, they bring their own furniture and everything.”

“By train?” said Reginald.

“More often by waggon. They only bring absolute necessities—such as bedding, pots and pans, and a few boxes to serve as tables and chairs. It is much like camping out.”

“It must be,” observed Reginald. “I am just going to take a peep inside.”

The cottages were merely wooden buildings of one story, and the windows were about waist-high from the ground. Reginald and May went up to the nearest window and looked in. They stood transfixed.

A man with disordered clothes lay on his back on the floor. For one moment they thought that he was asleep or drunk; the next moment they knew that he was dead.

Neither of them spoke. Reginald tried the window; it was not fastened, and he pushed it up and got into the room. He knelt down by the body, laid his ear to the breast, felt it, looked at it.

“Do not move him, Mr. Carson!” said May, in a low voice.

“I am not going to,” said Reginald. After a

moment's pause he added, "He has been dead some hours; he is quite cold; and—he has been strangled!"

May felt cold shudders running down her from head to foot; she moved to one side, and caught a glimpse of the dead man's face. It was blue and distorted, but she recognized it at once.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "it is that young Dutchman who was at the hotel all day yesterday!"

"Yes, it is," said Reginald, quietly; "and it looks like foul play." He came back and got through the window again, closing it after him. "Where is the nearest police-station, Miss Robertson?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"There is one not far off, across the flat," she replied. "If you will come back a little way I can point it out to you."

Just then they heard the whistle of the train as it came round the curve into the siding. There was no one on the platform, so it did not stop, but went on with a rush and a roar. Reginald and May were scarcely aware of it; all thought of going into town had vanished from their minds.

"Do you feel able to walk back alone, Miss Robertson, or shall I come with you first?" asked Reginald, turning and looking for the first time at her white, shocked face.

“Oh no,” she said bravely, though she was fighting against a deadly sickness and faintness that came over her. “Oh no, Mr. Carson, I am quite able to go back alone ; you must let the police know as quickly as possible.”

She was dimly conscious that Reginald was acting in a much more manly and self-controlled manner than she would have expected of him, and that she was receiving a new set of impressions concerning him ; but this consciousness was overlaid by the shuddering, sick horror that possessed her.

Reginald offered her his arm, and walked back with her until they came in sight of the police-station, when he left her, and strode off rapidly across the flats. May went slowly on to the hotel, and sought the refuge of her mother’s sympathy.

The event, of course, aroused a great sensation in the whole neighbourhood, especially as a halo of mystery surrounded it. No possible motive for the murder—for murder it undoubtedly was—and no clue to the murderer could be found.

The victim was a young Dutchman of good family, resident in Port Elizabeth, by name Wilhelm van der Riet. He had no enemies, and no quarrel with any one, as far as was known. He had a share in his father’s business, was well off, and generous with his money.

On the day he met his death, which was Wednesday, the 29th of January, he went out to the Good Hope hotel by a morning train, merely saying he wanted a day's outing; he gave no other reason for this proceeding, which was rather an unusual one for him, as he did not care for going out alone.

He spent the whole day at the hotel, sitting on the verandah and smoking, talking to no one, but looking about him from time to time as if half expecting some one, or as if he had some cause for uneasiness. Several people in the hotel had noticed this, but no reason could be assigned for it. He had left the hotel shortly before six o'clock, intending to return to Port Elizabeth by a train that passed the siding at six; that was the last time he was seen until Mr. Carson and Miss Robertson found his body on the following morning.

He had evidently been strangled, but not, apparently, with anything that he had about his person. He had struggled hard for life, but there were no footmarks or signs of a struggle anywhere near the cottage. The heavy rain of the night following would, however, have obliterated them. It seemed probable that the deed had been committed outside, and the body subsequently put through the window. Mr. McKinnon, the proprietor of the hotel, said that the windows of these

cottages were seldom fastened, and the lock of that one had been broken for some time.

It was a daring murder, committed in broad daylight, and the murderer had vanished into thin air. No one had been on the siding that evening; no one had been seen anywhere in the neighbourhood on whom suspicion could possibly fall. Every one in or about the hotel was able to give a satisfactory account of himself or herself on that evening. No clue could be found of any sort. The young man's family vowed terrible vengeance, but their most strenuous efforts failed to bring anything further to light. The whole affair, from beginning to end, was, and remained, a complete mystery.

One of its side results was to cement the friendship between Mr. Carson and the Robertsons. Reginald showed himself in a new light over this matter. He appeared older, more reticent, and more self-reliant. He was most considerate towards May, who had really suffered from the shock, and, much against her will, had to give evidence at the inquest; and he avoided the subject in conversation, with a refinement of feeling in marked contrast to the craving for sensational details manifested by every one else in the place.

The Fairbank who lived in Vryburg turned out to be, as Reginald observed, "again no connection of my

mother's;" and he resolved to prosecute his inquiries in Port Elizabeth. The Robertsons were returning home; but before they parted they had extracted a promise from Reginald that he would shortly make an excursion up-country and pay them a visit at their farm.

CHAPTER III.

It was the last day of March. A hot wind had been blowing all day since sunrise—a hot wind, every breath of which in one's face was like a blast from a burning fiery furnace; which roared continuously across the wide veldt, bearing clouds and clouds of fine sand, which hid every living thing under a uniform brown cloak of dust, which swirled and eddied along the broad straight street of Petrusville, which forced itself into every chink and cranny of every house, and piled itself up on every available square inch of surface without and within.

There is nothing so disabling as a hot wind. It reduces every living creature to the condition of a limp rag, it makes the grasshopper a burden, and the smallest piece of work too great a labour to be undertaken. Every one in Petrusville had collapsed gradually as the burning day went by. The white people disappeared into the coolest corners of their sand-smothered dwellings; the coloured people walked

forlornly on their errands, or lay asleep in every little bit of shade they could find; the very dogs lay stretched on their sides, with all their legs spread out for coolness, and their tails hanging disconsolate.

Into the midst of this universal apathy and limpness broke the cheerful, unmusical flourish of the post-horn, shortly followed by the thud of hoofs and rolling of wheels in the sandy ruts of the high-road. It was an ordinary, double-seated Cape cart, with two brown horses driven by a Kafir boy, clad in what had no doubt been a white suit when he started, but was now the prevailing colour of sand. Its arrival roused the village from its state of collapse; the sleepers arose and came out of their corners, the dogs began to prance and give tongue, the dwellers in houses looked forth with interest, and prepared for an expedition to the post-office to fetch their letters and papers.

At the post-office, a very modest and retiring little building, the post-cart drew up with another flourish on the horn, and her Majesty's mails, sealed up in canvas bags, were duly delivered to the postmaster. It then proceeded to the hotel, a straggling, one-storeyed building, with a deep verandah running round two sides of it, to deposit the passengers.

There were only two passengers in the post-cart on this afternoon. One was Reginald Carson; the other

was a small, round, elderly lady, who, as Reginald discovered, to his great surprise, in the course of conversation, was travelling about the country giving temperance lectures. Her appearance and manner were so meek and gentle that it was about the last thing in the world he would have expected to find her doing. She was a quiet, not a very entertaining companion, and Reginald was heartily tired of the dusty, wearisome journey by the time they drove into Petrusville.

There were two men standing on the verandah of the hotel as the cart drove up. One was the proprietor, Mr. Simeon, a black-haired, obsequious Jew; the other was a tall, sandy-haired, genial-looking Scotchman, whom Reginald at once knew to be Mr. Robertson, and whom he expected to meet him here. Mr. Robertson, on his part, had no difficulty in recognizing Reginald, and greeting him with hearty cordiality.

"I am afraid you have had a very disagreeable journey, Mr. Carson," he said, as they went inside. "Would you rather remain here to-night, and drive out to the farm to-morrow morning?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Reginald; "unless you wish to remain yourself. I am not tired, only sandy."

"That goes without saying," laughed Mr. Robertson. "Well, if you would rather drive out this evening, then

I will have my cart inspanned at once. Before we start I have to go down to my son's store to fetch a parcel, so perhaps you will excuse me for a few minutes."

"I will come with you," said Reginald.

He took stock of Petrusville as they went, and was not particularly prepossessed. It consisted, like all Dutch villages at their commencement, of one very broad, perfectly straight street, with small trees planted on either side of the roadway. The houses were mostly rather large, with deep verandahs, and gardens or yards at the back. There was only one house of two stories in the whole street—that was the Dutch minister's residence, and stood opposite the Dutch church, which was as ugly as the severest Christian could wish. On a pleasanter day, after a good shower of rain, there might have been much that was picturesque to be found even here; but at present, when everything was drooping and shrivelled, all the creepers and bushes brown with sand and parched with thirst, there was no loveliness to strike the eye, and Reginald, with a memory of green English fields, saw nothing to admire.

The store of Robertson Brothers was the largest and best in the street. It had a good window, well arranged, and a very fair assortment of goods of all

kinds within. One of the brothers was tall and broad-shouldered like his father, but much darker in hair and complexion ; the other was small and fair, and Reginald instantly perceived a strong likeness to the mother. This one came to the door when he saw his father and Reginald. His coat was off, and his shirt-sleeves were rolled up to his elbow, displaying a pair of muscular, sunburnt arms. Perhaps Reginald had never in his life shaken hands with a man who served behind a counter, as his equal, and it was not his fault that he was conscious of it. He spoke in a very friendly manner to young Robertson, and was really not in the least aware that he was a little bit "stand-offish."

The elder brother was engaged in serving a customer, and Reginald, while waiting, had his attention attracted to this man. He was very tall and splendidly proportioned, but his figure was not shown to advantage by the loose clothing he wore. Reginald glanced at the white calico jacket, flannel shirt, and thick cord trousers which made up his costume, and wished he could see him in football attire, for instance, or got up for a prize-fight ; "that would be an exhibition of muscle worth seeing," he thought. Just at that moment Robertson moved away to look for something, and his customer turned round, leaning sideways against the counter, and facing Reginald. At

the same time he removed his broad-brimmed felt hat, and pushed back the hair from his brow, with a sigh at the heat. He had a handsome face, much bronzed by sun and wind, blue eyes beneath a square brow, fair hair in crisp curls all over his head, and a heavy fair moustache. But although it was in itself a striking face, that was not why Reginald gazed at it almost beyond the bounds of good manners.

Either he had seen that face before, which was scarcely possible, or else it bore a strong resemblance to some other face which was familiar to him. He gazed and wondered, till Mr. Robertson, returning, announced that he was ready to start, whereupon they took leave of the two young men and walked back to the hotel.

Reginald was still haunted by that resemblance, which eluded him the more he tried to grasp it.

"Who is that fine-looking young fellow who was in the store just now?" he asked.

"That is Jan Vermaak, who has the next farm to mine," replied Mr. Robertson; "a very clever, enterprising young fellow, but keeps very much to himself. Makes lots of money, I think, even now, so he will be a rich man when he is older. He is only twenty-four."

"Is he a Dutchman?" said Reginald, surprised.

"Partly, I suppose. I really don't know what he is, but I am sure he has English blood in him."

“The name is Dutch.”

“Yes; but you can’t tell anything from that. We get so mixed up in this country. Not that there is any mixture, as yet, in my family, I am glad to say. Pure Scotch.”

“Should you object to your sons marrying into Dutch families?” said Reginald.

“Well, I shouldn’t like it,” owned Mr. Robertson. “I shouldn’t stop it, if there was no other objection, because I don’t believe in that sort of thing. And then, you must remember, we have not the best class of Dutch people here in the Karoo.”

“It always seems to me a pity when persons of different nations intermarry,” observed Reginald; “but I suppose that is a very narrow-minded idea.”

“I don’t see any objection to it in the case of equals,” said Mr. Robertson, “but I do where one is distinctly inferior to the other; as when a white man marries a Kafir woman, for instance.”

“Oh, but that is horrible!” exclaimed Reginald. “It seems incredible that any white man could do such a thing.”

“Yet it has been often done,” said Mr. Robertson, glancing at him with some amusement. “And, more wonderful still, white women have married coloured men. That, I confess, is beyond me altogether. Now,

I see that my cart is inspanned and waiting, so if you are ready, Mr. Carson, we will start."

Reginald enjoyed the drive out to the farm. The wind had suddenly gone down, the dust was less aggressive, and the air was refreshingly cool. Moreover, the aspect of the country was new to him, and he keenly enjoyed everything that was new. In his host he had a sensible and well-informed companion, who had read much, and took an intelligent interest in politics and all the events of the day. The eight-mile drive seemed short, although the road was none of the smoothest, and it was almost dark when they reached Brakplaat, which was the name of the farm. At the first gate they came to were three small boys, all sturdy, sandy-haired Robertsons, who, with many shouts of delight, disposed themselves about the cart, in front and behind. They were all three decidedly touzled and untidy, but they pulled off their caps and offered their grimy little hands to Reginald with ready politeness.

"Six boys and four girls, that is my quiver full, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Robertson, cheerfully. "The baby is a boy, and there are three girls younger than May, whom you know."

"So many children must be a good deal of anxiety," observed Reginald.

“Well, yes, sometimes; but they are a great pleasure too,” said the father, with a beaming smile.

“I hope Miss Robertson has got over the shock of that unpleasant affair at Good Hope,” said Reginald.

“Oh yes, I think so, thank you. She is too healthy-minded to brood over it, or anything of that sort. I suppose nothing has ever transpired concerning it?”

“No, I think not. It seems quite a mystery,” said Reginald.

They now approached the homestead—a large, low, whitewashed building, with a corrugated iron roof, and a wooden stoep, or verandah, on three sides. Every door and window stood open to admit the cool evening air, and everybody belonging to the place—mistress, children, servants, and dogs—seemed to be outside. Reginald thought it a pleasant, homely-looking place, not unlike many farm-houses he had seen in England, though the surroundings were totally different. It was a real pleasure to him to meet Mrs. Robertson and May once more, and their pleasure seemed equal to his. The innumerable olive-branches were duly introduced to him, leaving on his mind a confused impression of sandy hair, smiling sunburnt faces, and general disorder as to dress.

There was no disorder, however, when they all sat down to supper, an hour later, in the large dining-room.

The children were all there except the baby, who was in bed, and the two elder boys in Petrusville; there was no undue noise, no confusion, no bad manners, and a word or a look from either father or mother was instantly obeyed. Good temper and innocent fun seemed the prevailing characteristics, and Reginald came to the conclusion that they were a very nice family indeed. He wished he could transplant them bodily to the best farm on his grandfather's property at home.

"You can never be dull here at home," he observed to May, who sat next to him.

"No, indeed," she replied, smiling; "we have neither time nor inclination to be dull. There is too much work and too much fun going on."

Reginald thought of his solitary childhood, and wondered if he should have enjoyed this kind of life more. He was quick in observation, and on this first evening took in a good deal of his surroundings, and made notes thereon.

There was little comfort, according to his ideas of comfort, in the arrangements of the house. The rooms were carpetless, and some of them curtainless.

"It is too dusty a country for carpets and curtains," Mrs. Robertson explained to him one day.

There were no conveniences, such as he considered to

be everyday necessities. No water laid on, no gas, no couches and easy-chairs, no appliances for saving trouble of any sort. The Robertsons were poor, and made no pretence of being anything else. They had a good many visitors, and did their best to entertain them by simply making them quite at home. They kept one servant, and did the rest of the work themselves.

Reginald thought it a hard life, but they evidently did not think so themselves. Hard work was a matter of course, and they did not let slip any pleasure that they could have by the way.

“I believe in having your fun while you are young,” Mr. Robertson would say. “You can’t enjoy it when you are old.”

Every one was up and about at five on the following morning, and Reginald, who had always preferred early rising, was up too, rather to his host’s surprise. He went about the farm with Mr. Robertson, interested in everything he saw, while Mr. Robertson was no less interested to hear about English methods of farming, in which Reginald was well versed.

“Your estate must be an immense interest to you, Mr. Carson, and give you plenty of occupation too.”

“I love every stick and stone on it,” said Reginald, earnestly; “but it is not mine,” he added conscientiously.

“Well, I hope it will be some day, for I am sure it ought to be,” said his host. “You have not found any trace of your uncle yet?”

“Not the very slightest,” said Reginald. “I feel inclined to give it up sometimes, for I really don’t know what to try next.”

His tone expressed sincere disappointment, and Mr. Robertson gave him a curious and admiring glance.

“I am afraid I have no advice to offer you,” he said. “So many young men come out to this country for the purpose of losing themselves; they change their name, and destroy every connection with the old country. After so many years, I am afraid it is rather a hopeless quest.”

“My mother frets so about him,” said Reginald. “For her sake I would give anything and do anything to find out what had become of him.”

“I can quite understand that,” said Mr. Robertson, heartily. “I wish I were able to help you.”

They had returned to the house for breakfast, and found May sitting on the stoep with a large dishful of raw coffee. Reginald had never even seen coffee in the bean, and at first did not know what it was. He was surprised to hear that they roasted and ground it themselves.

“When this dishful is roasted it will last us for a week,” said May. “It is not at all difficult to do, but of course it can be badly done.”

“You know how to do a great many things,” said Reginald, with a glance at her strong, capable hands.

“Things of this sort—yes,” replied May; “but not things I should really like to know.”

“What sort of things?” he asked.

“Oh, drawing, and playing the violin, and languages, and everything else,” she replied, laughing, as she got up and carried the dish of coffee into the house. “Breakfast is ready, Mr. Carson.”

After breakfast all the children disappeared. Reginald asked May where they were.

“They are gone to school,” she said. And when he inquired the whereabouts of the school, she replied, “It is what we call a farm school. We and some of our neighbours join together to get a good teacher, and we have a grant from Government. The school-house is about a mile from here. There are thirty children now, boys and girls, Dutch and English, of all ages from five to eighteen.”

“It must be very difficult to teach them all together,” said Reginald.

“Yes, it is; but it is the only way to manage in these country districts, unless each one had a private

governess or tutor, which we cannot all afford. There is a school in Petrusville, but that is too far."

Reginald perceived that education, like other things, was attended with difficulties in a new country, which no longer existed in the old. Perhaps, for that reason, it was more valued. He was beginning to see that a life in which nothing was provided for you without your own effort, might be beneficial in the formation of character.

CHAPTER IV.

REGINALD stayed on at the farm because he liked it. He was always fond of an outdoor life, but here there was a freedom, an absence of conventionality, which no kind of life in England could afford, and which compensated for the lack of some refinements and advantages. He said something of this one day to May. They were out riding, several of them together.

"You would miss them in the long run, though," she said in reply. "I mean, if you tried to lead this kind of life altogether."

"Yes, I dare say I should," said Reginald, frankly. "And of course I must live in England; but I should always like to take a trip to the colony whenever I got a chance."

"And you will always be welcome here when you do, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Robertson, who was riding on the other side, "as long as there is a Robertson on the place."

"I am sure I should always enjoy myself here," said

Reginald, heartily ; and yet something in his tone jarred on May ; she fancied a trace of patronage in it. She was apt to fancy this when talking to Reginald.

She expressed this feeling one evening to her father and mother when Reginald had retired to write letters for the English mail, and the children were gone to bed. Mr. Robertson spoke in hearty praise of the young man, to whom he had taken a great liking.

“ Yes, he is very nice,” said May, “ if only he were not quite so—superior.”

“ Well, I have never thought him conceited,” said her father. “ He seems to me so natural and unaffected.”

“ He is not conceited,” said May, “ but he thinks himself a cut above us ; and, without meaning it, I dare say, he shows it.”

“ Well, from his point of view he *is* a cut above us,” said her father. “ You must remember that he was born in a class which for generations has considered itself privileged, and that he took in these ideas from baby-hood ; he has had a most exclusive bringing-up, by his own account, which, in my opinion, has left him wonderfully unspoilt. His mother and grandfather evidently made a little god of him. As to education, he is undoubtedly superior to any of us.”

“ He has had more opportunities,” said May, quickly. This was rather a sore point with her.

“And he has made a good use of them, which we have not all done,” put in her mother. “And, after all,” she added, “these are very little things, and quite on the surface. What strikes me more than anything about Mr. Carson is, that he is practically heir to an estate which has always been his home, and to which he is deeply attached, and yet he has come out here of his own accord, and is spending time, trouble and money in order to find an uncle who is probably a disreputable scoundrel, and who, if he does turn up, will deprive the young man of all his prospects. And there is no doubt that Mr. Carson’s disappointment at not finding any trace of him is quite sincere and genuine.”

“Yes, and chiefly on his mother’s account,” said Mr. Robertson; “he seems to have no thought of himself in the matter. I quite agree with you, Mary; I think he is a fine character.”

May felt rebuked, and determined to feel more justly towards Mr. Carson. She did not know that her mother was arguing against herself as much as against her daughter, but so it was. Several times, when she had watched Reginald chatting in quite a friendly, natural manner with May, she had known, as well as if he had said it to her in so many words, that such a thing as an alliance between himself and the daughter of a Cape

farmer had never entered his mind as a possibility, and would be looked upon with complete disapproval by his relations at home. Not that she wished him to marry her daughter, in the least; she would have thought such a match very unsuitable, and had no idea that it would confer any honour upon the family; but she knew that May was quite good enough for him, perhaps too good, and it irritated her to know that he, or that any one, would not think so.

She had kept these thoughts entirely to herself, however, and nothing of the feeling had ever shown itself in her manner; so that May blamed herself for being prejudiced and fanciful, and resolved to be so no more.

She had an opportunity of putting her resolves into practice on the following day. It was Saturday, and the two brothers from Petrusville had come over, as they often did, to spend Sunday at the farm. The younger one, Ralph, was going to drive over to the next farm to arrange about a purchase of mohair with Jan Vermaak, and Reginald was to accompany him. While waiting for the cart, he seated himself on the stoep beside May, who was busy with needlework, of which there was never any lack in that household.

“I wonder, since coloured labour is so cheap,” he

observed, "that you don't keep a tribe of servants, as people do in India."

"I should be very sorry if we did," said May, laughing; "these natives are not like the Hindoos, I imagine. The more servants you keep here, the more work and worry you have."

"How so?" asked Reginald.

"Oh, because they are so untrustworthy, and so dirty, and so transcendently stupid. Yesterday I told the girl to chop some suet, and she fetched a hammer and hammered it into a flat mass."

"I think that showed originality," said Reginald, dryly.

"I would rather be spared their originality, then," said May, laughing again. "But really, Mr. Carson, you, who are accustomed to trained white servants, have no idea what it is to work with these people. You never seem to get any further with them, and in the end you would rather do the work yourself."

"I am afraid I should leave it undone," observed Reginald. "What lovely figures the women have, though," he added, as he watched two of them who were walking up from the river with buckets full of water poised upon their heads.

"Yes, haven't they?" said May. "I suppose it is

partly because they are accustomed to carry such heavy weights on their heads, from babyhood almost. You see little mites of four and five years old carrying great loads of wood that way. It makes them so upright, and so perfectly balanced in every part."

"I saw a Kafir woman in the street one day in Port Elizabeth," said Reginald; "I could not help turning to look at her. She was not such a very young woman, but so extremely graceful, and she walked like a queen. What also struck me was, that she was leading a child by the hand, which looked like her own. I mean, it was dressed like a Kafir child, and yet it was nearly white. A little girl of about six years old, with quite fair hair."

"Very likely it was her own," said May, quietly, "if the father was a white man. It often happens."

"I should not have thought the child of a Kafir woman could be so white as that under any circumstances," said Reginald.

"Oh yes," replied May; "where the two races intermarry, it is most curious how the difference shows itself. One child in a family will be quite white, and its brother or sister coal black, and so on for generations afterwards. The coloured blood never seems to be eliminated once it is introduced. Sometimes, in a family which has quite forgotten its one dark-skinned

ancestor, a member will suddenly appear who is a most unpleasant reminder."

"It is a great calamity," said Reginald, with energy, "and a most wicked thing for any white man or woman to do."

Colonists, as a rule, are less tolerant of the native than people fresh from England; but Reginald's fastidious nature shrank from actual contact with the dark-skinned race. May was quite at one with him in this, and yet somehow it irritated her to discuss the subject with him. She was glad when Ralph, driving round in the cart, put an end to the conversation.

Presently the children, who had a half-holiday from school, came round her, clamouring for a walk, and May put away her work to go with them. She was a child herself with the children, enjoying their games, and entering into all their interests as much as they did themselves, yet able to exercise authority over them when needful. The days were drawing in, and it was already growing dark when they returned from their walk. There was a coloured boy on horseback talking to Mr. Robertson, who had a note in his hand. May thought nothing of it until she came close to them, and then she saw at once by her father's face that something was amiss.

"What has happened, father?" she asked, standing beside him.

He handed her the note. "There has been an accident, my child," he said. "Ralph does not seem to be much hurt, but Mr. Carson, I grieve to say, has broken his leg. It happened close to Vermaak's gate, and he is lying at his house."

The note was from Jan Vermaak, and stated briefly what Mr. Robertson had just repeated, adding that Mr. Carson could not be moved, and that the messenger was to go on at once to Petrusville for the doctor.

While May was reading it, her mother came out and joined them.

"May," she said, "your father is going to take me over to Mr. Vermaak's to-night. I shall have to stay and nurse Mr. Carson, and Ralph, if he needs it. I must leave you in charge. Harold will stay with you until your father comes back."

"Yes, mother; that will be all right," said May, composedly. "But how are you going?"

"Vermaak is sending his own cart and horses for us," put in Mr. Robertson, "so this boy tells me; but they had to send for the horses; I dare say it will be here soon. I must give this fellow a fresh horse to go on to Petrusville."

He went away to see about it, and May hastened

indoors to put together what things her mother would need to take with her. Both mother and daughter were calm, collected, and prompt, so that Mrs. Robertson was quite ready to start when Mr. Vermaak's cart drove up, about ten minutes later.

"There is no absolute necessity for you to go with me, James," she said to her husband; "the boy will drive me all right."

"I would rather come," he replied, "and see how things are for myself. Then I can bring Ralph home to-morrow, if he is able to come."

Hasty good-byes passed between parents and children, with a few last directions, and then the horses' heads were turned round again, and the cart presently disappeared in the gathering darkness, the whole family straining their eyes to watch it as they stood grouped on the verandah.

"What a comfort it is," said Mrs. Robertson to her husband, "that Harold and May are two such reliable, good children!"

"Yes, indeed," he replied heartily; "they are both so steady and sensible, one can leave them in charge without any misgivings. But, Mary, I feel terribly upset about poor Carson."

"So do I," she replied; "it is worse, in one way, than if the accident had happened to Ralph. And I shall have to write to his mother, I suppose."

They questioned the boy who was driving them, but he could give them no information, and they had to wait for further satisfaction until they reached Vermaak's farm. Ralph came out to meet them, to their great relief. He walked stiffly, and had an ugly cut on his lip, but was not, as he assured them, seriously hurt. He was in great distress of mind, however, about Reginald, whose leg was broken ; and about his horses, both of which were lamed, while the cart was badly broken.

"We had just passed the camp gate," he said, in telling them how it happened, "and where the road goes along the side of the kopje, we met a waggon. It is an awkward place, but I should have got by all right, only the fool of a driver must needs crack his whip and yell, and that made old Bob shy. I was not expecting it; he made a sudden rush to the side, and over the kranz we went, right on to the stones. Carson was underneath, and got the worst of it; but I did not fall on him; I was thrown quite clear, and fell about three yards beyond him. He got his leg in the wheel somehow, that's how it got broken."

Jan Vermaak came out to them and brought them in. He was full of concern and anxiety to help. They must not think of moving Mr. Carson, he said; he was not fit for it, and he was quite welcome to

the shelter of his roof, and to all that he could do for him for as long as it should be necessary, and Ralph also.

“You are very good, Mr. Vermaak,” said Mrs. Robertson; “and I fear we shall have to trespass on your hospitality for some time. I will stay and nurse Mr. Carson; but I expect Ralph will be able to go home with his father to-morrow.”

“Arrange everything just as you think best,” said Jan. “My cart and horses are at your disposal whenever you want them. Your horses can stay in my stable, and I will send your cart to Petrusville on Monday to be repaired.”

“We are very much indebted to you, Vermaak,” said Mr. Robertson, heartily; “but we must not give you too much trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” said Jan, courteously. “Will you come and see Mr. Carson now?”

They found Reginald quite conscious, and though in great pain he spoke bravely and cheerfully. He was full of gratitude to Jan Vermaak, and to Mrs. Robertson for coming to nurse him; and he was most anxious to exonerate Ralph—who was very down-hearted—from all blame. The accident, he said, was purely an accident, and no one could justly be blamed, unless it was the driver of the waggon, who was thoughtless.

"In which he is like the rest of his kind," said Mr. Robertson. "Well, Mr. Carson, we are very much grieved about it, but we will be thankful it is no worse. And everything that we can do for you shall be done."

"I am sure of that," said Reginald.

The doctor came late at night and set the leg. Jan had already put it into temporary splints, and the doctor was surprised to see how cleverly it was done. He told Jan he ought to be a surgeon.

"A Cape farmer must be a little of everything," said Jan.

So it came to pass that Reginald was laid up for some time in the house of a stranger, and thereby unknowingly entered on a fresh phase of life, which brought to him experiences and trials hitherto undreamed of.

CHAPTER V.

JAN VERMAAK lived alone on his farm of Bosman's Kloef. His house was well built, and contained four rooms: two bedrooms, which he gave up to Mrs. Robertson and Reginald, a living-room, and a kitchen. An old Hottentot woman cooked for him, and kept his house in order after a fashion of her own. Certainly there were many little deficiencies in cleanliness and tidiness which offended Mrs. Robertson's house-wifely eye, and she contrived in an unobtrusive manner to effect various small improvements during her stay in Jan's house.

Reginald became sincerely attached to Mrs. Robertson. She was an ideal nurse, even-tempered, quiet, and companionable. Quick and dexterous, without ever being fussy, she always seemed to know at once what he wanted, often when he did not know himself, and she was never put out by the small annoyances and inconveniences inseparable from nursing an invalid in a colonial bachelor's farm-house. Reginald missed the

comforts of home and the care of his mother far less than he would have expected.

On the other hand, Reginald himself was a good patient. He was naturally sweet-tempered, and anxious not to give trouble; and he was a stoic in bearing pain, considering it quite disgraceful to complain. In nursing him, Mrs. Robertson quite overcame, and indeed forgot, the slight prejudice she had had against him before, and thus a mutual good understanding was established between them.

In his host Reginald found a fruitful subject of speculation. He was accustomed to systematic and reasonable habits of thought; but, until he left England, his experience had been so narrow that he had become acquainted with but few types of character or modes of life, differing much from his own, and thus he found it very difficult to "place" his new friend.

Jan's highest virtue, apparently, was hospitality. This was to him a sacred duty, and in its exercise he spared no pains. It was sufficient that Reginald and Mrs. Robertson were his guests, though uninvited, for him to show them every attention in his power; sympathy for his guest's suffering and helplessness did not appear to be nearly so strong a motive with him as the simple fact that he was living, for the time, under his roof.

The young farmer was excessively reserved, perhaps from shyness, and not very sociable. His manner was brusque, sometimes to rudeness, yet this never seemed to be intentional. Reginald, however, would certainly have taken offence more than once, had he not felt too keenly the obligations under which he lay to his host.

One day, for instance, Jan had related how a man he knew, by an ingenious lie had converted what would have been a loss to him of some pounds into a considerable gain at another man's expense.

Reginald's expressive face showed strong disapproval. "Was the man a Dutchman?" he asked.

"No," said Jan; "he was an Englishman. An English gentleman, I believe."

"An English *gentleman*," said Reginald, with proud emphasis, "always speaks the truth, whatever it may cost him."

"An English gentleman is a fool, then," replied Jan, abruptly.

Reginald flushed and bit his lip, but natural courtesy and gratitude kept him silent. Mrs. Robertson was not in the room, or she would probably have found some way of smoothing over the incident.

In spite of his cold exterior, Jan had a passionate temper. Reginald more than once heard him swearing freely at his servants; and on one occasion, when some

coloured children who lived on the place had been doing some mischief, Reginald, lying on his couch by the open window, saw Jan chasing them with a *sjambok*. The first one he caught would no doubt have had a sound thrashing, but for a little Kafir girl, who ran boldly up to Jan and caught hold of his arm, evidently begging him to spare them. To Reginald's surprise, Jan dropped his hand, and, after administering a rebuke in no very gentle terms to the other children, turned away.

Reginald several times noticed this Kafir child. She appeared to be about nine years old, and was better dressed than the other coloured children, whose costume was frequently very similar to the Emperor of China's new clothes in Andersen's famous tale. She also seemed to be privileged beyond the rest, for she came into the kitchen whenever she liked, and Mrs. Robertson observed one day that she believed the child slept there. Old Leentje, the Hottentot servant, never slept in the house, but went to her own hut.

On one occasion Reginald saw a little incident which greatly astonished him, and showed Jan in quite a different aspect. From his couch by the window he commanded a good space in front of the homestead, and made various observations. One afternoon he saw Jan coming home on horseback; he had been into

Petrusville. Jan was a splendid horseman, and Reginald watched with pleasure his easy, graceful attitude as he came at a slow canter up the road. When he was about a hundred yards from the house, this little Kafir girl came running out to meet him. Jan reined in his horse, and stooped down to lift her up in front of him ; then, holding her firmly with his arm, he bent down and kissed her two or three times with great appearance of affection, after which he rode slowly on to the stables, disappearing round the corner of the house.

“ Well, I *couldn't* bring myself to do that ! ” thought Reginald ; and when he related the incident to Mrs. Robertson, she seemed equally surprised.

“ The child always looks clean and well-kept,” she observed ; “ but that is really a little too much. Mr. Vermaak is a strange man in some ways.”

“ You do not know him well ? ” asked Reginald.

“ I scarcely knew him at all until now. He only bought this farm about eight or nine months ago, and I had never been in his house until I came to nurse you.”

“ He *is* strange,” said Reginald, thoughtfully. “ Sometimes I cannot make him out at all.”

A fresh light was thrown on the subject the next time the doctor from Petrusville paid his periodical

visit. Reginald looked forward to these visits, for the doctor was a pleasant, chatty fellow, and a thorough gentleman. He had lived for some years in England, and happened to know friends of Reginald's. On the present occasion, the professional part of the conversation being over, the doctor sat talking on various subjects, and Mrs. Robertson presently joined them.

They saw Jan starting out for his kraals with his long swinging stride.

"What a splendid-looking fellow he is!" said Reginald, admiringly.

"Yes, a perfect Hercules," agreed the doctor. "He does not show the least trace of being off-coloured, does he?"

"Off-coloured! What do you mean?" exclaimed Reginald.

"Oh, there is no doubt he has coloured blood in him," replied the doctor, "though I don't know to what extent. It is on the mother's side, for his father was certainly a white man, and, I believe, an Englishman."

"Who took a Dutch name?" said Mrs. Robertson.

"Yes, I suppose so. You can see some signs of the intermixture in this man, too, if you know how to look for them. That very crisp hair, for instance, although it is light-coloured, and his eyes, when he is excited,

betray him. Look at his finger-nails if you get a chance."

"I have heard of that," said Mrs. Robertson. "The arch at the base of the nail is dark-coloured, is it not?"

"Yes, it has a blue tinge instead of being white," said the doctor. "Oh, there is no hiding it, in the long run."

"Has Mr. Vermaak any relations living?" asked Reginald. The disclosure had been a shock to him, and he had been silent for some minutes.

"Yes; I believe they live in Port Elizabeth," said the doctor. "His father is dead, I know; but I do not know about his mother, or what family he may have."

"They must be well off," observed Mrs. Robertson. "Mr. Vermaak paid a long price for this farm."

"So I heard," replied the doctor. "It is a curious fact," he added, "that that young Dutchman, Van der Riet, who was found dead at Good Hope a few months back, was very anxious to buy this farm. It was put up to auction, but Vermaak, who was determined to have it, bought it by private purchase two days beforehand. That is why he had to give so much for it. Van der Riet was furiously angry, and swore that he would be even with him one day; but he never had the chance, poor fellow!"

"So it was he who had a grudge against Mr.

Vermaak?" said Mrs. Robertson, as if following out a train of thought in her own mind.

"Yes, not Vermaak against him," said the doctor, rising. "Well, I must be off. Vermaak has a comfortable little shanty here. He added to it when he bought the farm, I think?"

"Yes, he built on this bedroom in which we are sitting," said Mrs. Robertson. "Old Leentje, the servant, tells me that there was some idea at the time that he was about to be married, but that seems to be only a tale."

"Oh, it will come some day, no doubt," said the doctor, who was recently married himself. "Good-bye, Mrs. Robertson; good-bye, Mr. Carson," and away he went.

"That little Kafir girl is probably some relation of Mr. Vermaak's," Mrs. Robertson observed quietly that evening.

"Yes, I suppose she is," said Reginald, with some disgust.

CHAPTER VI.

THE discovery that there was something of the original savage in Jan's nature was a help to Reginald in understanding his character. It was comprehensible that to him hospitality was the highest virtue, while truth was no virtue at all. His sudden and uncontrollable bursts of passion were also accounted for, as well as a certain vindictiveness which Reginald thought he had observed in him. He did not seem to care about money once he had obtained it, though he was sharp enough in obtaining it; and he was recklessly generous, but without judgment.

And in spite of this strange mixture of qualities, Reginald could not help liking him; some attraction beyond gratitude for his uniform kindness to himself drew him to this man, and it was strengthened, no doubt, by the fact that it was mutual. Jan had also, and evidently, taken a great liking to Reginald.

That haunting likeness to some familiar face Reginald often saw, perhaps more often as he became

more familiar with his host's features. It was a likeness mostly in expression, and came out suddenly and strongly at all sorts of odd moments; but *whom* he resembled Reginald could never determine, though he often pondered over it.

When Reginald was fairly on the road to convalescence, Mrs. Robertson went home for a few days to see how things were going on, and relieve May of some of her responsibilities. Jan willingly undertook meanwhile to do everything that was necessary for the invalid, and kept his word by waiting on him hand and foot. Under these conditions he showed himself in his best light, and Reginald left off criticizing him, and heartily liked him.

About two days after Mrs. Robertson's departure, Reginald received the usual weekly letter from his mother by the mail. They exchanged letters by every mail, and Reginald had kept this up even all through his illness. It was only a month since his accident, so that this letter of his mother's had been written before she heard of it.

Mrs. Carson was a prolix writer, and fond of details. Her pen, like her thoughts, travelled freely, making various little excursions into side paths as it went along, one incident or reflection calling up another. She was an ideal letter writer in one respect, however,

that she wrote not what interested herself only, but whatever she thought likely to interest her correspondent; and Reginald settled down to read this one with his usual pleasurable anticipations. Jan had gone out, and he was alone.

“I have a most curious tale to relate to you,” began the second page of the letter, “a most romantic one too, and will interest you, particularly as it occurred in the very country you are now visiting. First of all, I must tell you that I have the most charming girl staying with me, by name Gertrude Lisle. She is an orphan, and a *protégée* of dear old Lady Duncan’s—you must remember her well. The poor old soul had a paralytic stroke not long ago, and this girl, who is living with her, nursed her most devotedly. When I was last in town I went to call at the house, and found that Mrs. Everett, Lady Duncan’s married daughter, had only just arrived from Hungary, or some such out-of-the-way place, where the news of her mother’s illness did not reach her for some days. Poor Miss Lisle was quite knocked up with anxiety and watching, and Mrs. Everett asked me if I would mind taking her home with me for a few days’ rest, which I gladly did the very next day. She has been with me a week, and a most delightful companion she is; I hope not to part with her yet, for I hear that dear Lady Duncan is much

better, though, of course, she cannot ever entirely recover, which is very sad to think of.

“My dear boy, I wish you were at home—I always wish that, of course, only supposing that your mission were successfully accomplished—but I mean I should so like you to become acquainted with Gertrude Lisle. I am sure you would be charmed with her as much as I am; there is really no fault to be found in her disposition—so amiable and obliging, and always the same. But I must really get on to my story, or you will think it is never coming.

“It seems that Miss Lisle was suffering from a delicacy of the chest some time ago, and the doctors ordered her to South Africa for a year. They say the climate is so good for consumptive people; and certainly Miss Lisle was quite set up by it, and stood the cold winds this spring remarkably well. *You* never had anything the matter with your chest, I am thankful to say; but I have no doubt the change will do you good all the same.

“Well, it seems that during the last three months of her stay, Miss Lisle was with some friends in Port Elizabeth, with whom she had arranged to return home. They were sailing in the *Scot*, at the end of January—that is last January—which was a bad time of year for her; but she was quite recovered, and very anxious to

travel with them, so it was settled. However, it happened that at their house she met a young man, a Mr. Vermaak, who was partly Dutch and partly English, she was told, and who must have fallen in love with her at first sight—at which I do not wonder, for she is a very pretty girl, and attractive in every way.

“It has just occurred to me that you might easily have met her yourself in Port Elizabeth—and I only wish you had. However, this young Vermaak—I could not spell the name till she told me how—after three weeks’ acquaintance only, made her an offer of marriage, accompanied with the most passionate declaration of his feelings for her. She, poor girl, was quite overwhelmed, and did not know what to say. She put him off for another fortnight, and then accepted him. She says he was one of the handsomest men she ever saw, a magnificent figure, and quite young—not five and twenty. I think she was really fond of him too, for she cried when she told me about it; and she had quite made up her mind to go and live in some terribly remote place on a farm which he had bought.

“She still kept to her plan of going home with her friends, intending to buy the things she required in England, and to go out again to be married in March or April. She wanted to wait longer, but he was so

impatient she had to give in ; and he could not bear parting with her even for that short time.

“ Well, on the morning of the day before they were to sail—early, about seven o’clock—she was told that a young man was waiting to see her, who would not give his name, but said his business was of the utmost importance. Mysterious, was it not ? She had him shown up, and interviewed him in the presence of her friend, Mr. Sinclair. It was a young Dutchman—he would not say who he was, but asked her most earnestly if it was true that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Vermaak. On her replying that it was, he asked her if she was aware that Mr. Vermaak’s mother was a Kafir woman, and that he had several brothers and sisters who were quite black ! Only imagine, my dear Reginald !

“ Miss Lisle was very angry, and would not believe it, for Mr. Vermaak had told her that his mother was a Dutch lady of good family, that she had been dead some years, and that he had no near relations living. This young man, however, was so serious and so much in earnest, that she could not help listening to him. Finally, he offered to take her to see Mr. Vermaak’s mother, so that she might ask what questions she liked of her, and convince herself that what he said was true. At first she refused, but afterwards she consented,

provided Mr. Sinclair went too, which, of course, he agreed to do. You see, she had known Mr. Vermaak but a short time, and she could not help thinking that he *might* have deceived her. He, I must tell you, was away at his farm, but was coming down by the train that evening, so as to see her off the next day.

“ Well, they went with this young Dutchman, who refused to tell them his name, because he was afraid of Mr. Vermaak, who, it seems, was a very passionate man. Not that Gertrude would ever have betrayed him, had she known his name, or Mr. Sinclair either. He took them to a little cottage in a side street—a neat, clean place—and there they found a Kafir woman, quite black, but a lovely figure, Gertrude says, nicely dressed, and could speak and understand English fairly well. Of course, she knew nothing of Gertrude, and had not the least idea that she was engaged to Mr. Vermaak. They pretended that they had expected to find him there, and that they had some business with him; and by a few adroit questions Mr. Sinclair easily proved beyond a doubt that she was indeed Mr. Vermaak’s own mother. The father was an Englishman—what a horribly degraded Englishman!—and one of the little girls was very white, with fair hair, and so like Mr. Vermaak himself, that there could be no doubt she was his sister. And even the black ones were like

him too, which made poor Miss Lisle feel quite sick when she thought what a narrow escape she had had.

“The young Dutchman would not come into the house with them, or show himself; and when they came out he only waited to hear that they were convinced of his truthfulness, and then took leave of them at once. Miss Lisle went back to the hotel, where she wrote an indignant note to Mr. Vermaak, reproaching him for his base deception, and refusing ever to see him again. After that they went on board the *Scot* at once, leaving the note with the hotel manager to give to Mr. Vermaak when he called that evening. They fully expected that he would come to them on board, but he never did, and they were greatly relieved when they sailed without seeing him again. She has never heard of him since, nor, indeed, had any news from the Cape since she came home.

“The poor child was much distressed over the whole affair. I was the only person, she said, except, of course, the Sinclairs, to whom she had told it. I told her very kindly that I thought she had been rash in engaging herself to a man of whom she knew so little, and she owned that it was so, but said that she was quite touched and carried away by his excessive devotion to herself, which is not surprising in such a young girl, and shows a tender heart.

“My dear boy, I hope you will not fall foul of any of these wild people; do take care of yourself. I shall not be really happy till you are safe at home again.

“I am writing this late at night, for it must go by the early post to-morrow morning, to catch the mail. So, as I am very tired, I will say good-bye, and God bless you and give you success, my dearest boy, is the continual prayer of

“Your most loving mother,

“ALICIA CARSON.”

CHAPTER VII.

It was almost dark when Reginald came to the end of his letter, and he could only just decipher the last words. He laid it down, feeling cold, sick, and weary.

There was no doubt in his mind that the man under whose roof he was staying was the same of whom his mother wrote. Name, description, and many little details of time and circumstance confirmed the fact. When Jan bought the farm there had been an idea among the servants that he was about to be married, which event, however, had never taken place. Only yesterday old Leentje had been telling him, in her Hottentot Dutch, of which Reginald had already picked up enough to catch her meaning, how she had said to the "Baas," when he was building this bedroom—Why did he build such a nice new room? Who was it for? And the Baas had laughed and said nothing. And she had asked him then—Was it not that he was going to bring a missis to live there? But he only laughed again, and told her not to ask questions, but he was

not angry. And then one day he went away, and did not come back for two nights; and when he came, his face was like the thunder-clouds that come from the north; and he never talked any more, but he swore a great deal more than he used to do. And the missis had never come yet.

All this corresponded to a hair's breadth with the story of the broken engagement. Moreover, he had already been told with certainty that Jan had coloured blood in him, derived from the mother's side. No doubt his mother was herself a Kafir woman, who had married an Englishman, and the little Kafir girl for whom he showed such remarkable affection was one of his own sisters.

As Reginald's thoughts travelled on, unfolding the story bit by bit, he recoiled from the horrible conclusion to which they forced him. The only thing wanting to complete the chain of evidence was the name of the young Dutchman who had called on Miss Lisle. Was it not Van der Riet? Van der Riet had a bitter grudge against Jan for buying a farm which he wanted himself. An opportunity occurred to him, perhaps quite unexpectedly, of paying off that grudge by putting an end to Jan's marriage, and he promptly availed himself of it, concealing his name for fear of Jan's vengeance. Had not that vengeance,

nevertheless, overtaken him? The *Scot* sailed on the twenty-ninth of January—Reginald remembered that distinctly—and on the morning of the thirtieth he himself and May Robertson had found the body of Van der Riet in the empty house. Was not Jan Vermaak his murderer?

Reginald heartily wished himself back at Brakplaat, and for the first time rebelled against his helplessness and inability to move. The thought of remaining as a guest in that house, and being waited on and tended by its master, was horrible to him. The mere possibility of his suspicion being true was a nightmare; he tried to realize what it meant, but he could not realize it; he could only feel it like a cold, deathly mist that had come with the night. He tried to shake it off, but, like a mist, it clung to him; he groped in it, and saw no way out.

Reginald had never told his mother about the murder, or his own interest in it. She was a nervous woman, and disliked to hear of horrors, and it would have caused her great distress to know that her son had been in any way mixed up with an inquest. He was glad now to think that he had never mentioned it to her. Her quick woman's wit would have pieced out the story even more readily than he had done it himself; and when she learned that he was laid up helpless

in the house of a man who was at least possibly a murderer, her anxiety would have been intolerable. It was some comfort to him to think that she need never know it.

The door opened, and Jan came in, strong and cheerful.

“What, all in the dark, Carson?” he said. “Haven’t you a light there?”

“Yes, thank you,” replied Reginald, feeling as if he spoke in a dream; “but I did not want it just now.”

Jan produced his matches—he was a great smoker—and lighted the small lamp on the table beside Reginald’s couch.

“Why, you look quite done up this evening,” he said, looking at his guest with concern. “What have you been doing to yourself?” Then, observing the letter, “Have you had bad news from home?”

“I have had some news that rather worries me,” said Reginald, evasively. “I suppose that is why I do not feel quite so well. I shall be all right to-morrow.”

Jan forbore to ask further questions—he often showed unexpected consideration in small matters—and went out of the room to tell Leentje to bring the supper. His absence brought to Reginald a momentary sense of relief. He saw plainly that for the present he must speak and act as if nothing had occurred to alter

the relations between himself and his host; and he braced himself for the effort, which was of a kind to which he was totally unaccustomed. He had disciplined himself in many ways, but he had never learned to conceal or to "put on."

When the supper was brought in, he forced himself to eat, though it seemed as if every mouthful must choke him; he forced himself to look at Jan and talk to him in his usual manner, in spite of the shuddering repulsion which seemed to run through him from head to foot. But a worse trial came when supper was over, and Jan helped him to bed. As Reginald felt the touch of the large, powerful hands, which moved and lifted him with the ease and gentleness belonging to great muscular strength, he seemed to see them fastened in a relentless death-grip on the throat of the murdered man, stifling the agonized cry for mercy, gradually choking out the life from the writhing form, then lifting the disfigured corpse through the window and laying it on the floor of the desolate little room.

He needed all his self-command—more than he had known himself to possess—to remain quiet and passive while Jan undressed him and lifted him into bed; and he gave a deep sigh of relief when he found himself at last alone.

And now another question arose in his bewildered

brain. Was it his duty to reveal what he knew? What he knew did not amount to certain proof; but it would be strong circumstantial evidence, especially if supported by Miss Lisle, who could be produced as a witness. Other proofs would probably then be brought to light; or Jan, if brought to bay, would perhaps confess. If, then, it was in his power to bring a guilty man to justice, would he not, by keeping silence, make himself a partaker in his crime? Yet the thought of thus returning Jan's kindness to him was almost as horrible as the other thought of continuing to enjoy it.

He passed a miserable night, unable to sleep. Jan slept in the adjoining room, which was his own, but which he had given up to Mrs. Robertson while she was there. Reginald could hear his regular, healthy breathing, for the door was open between the two rooms, in case he should want anything in the night. That night he felt he would rather have died without help than have asked for so much as a cup of water. He wondered how it was that a man with such terrible guilt on his soul could sleep so soundly and peacefully, while he, who was innocent as the day, lay tossing and sleepless, racked with mental torture. How he wished that he had never met this man, never made a friend of him, never liked him. Why had an unkind fate thrown

him into the arms of this felon, and made him his helpless and dependent guest?

Reginald had never told Jan about the uncle for whom he was searching. He had taken to heart the advice Mrs. Robertson had given him, and had spoken of his guest only to those who were likely to be able to help him. He was glad now that it was so; it would have been an additional weight on his mind had he taken Jan into his confidence. For what confidence could be safely reposed in a man who was evidently utterly unprincipled and unscrupulous?

As the night wore on, the question of his own responsibility became more acutely tormenting to him. "Accessory to the crime." These words repeated themselves over and over in his brain, until they became like a haunting tune, and drove him to the verge of delirium. One minute he told himself that he had no actual proof of his conviction; the next minute his candid mind rejected the sophism, and replied that the proofs lay ready to hand. Then the idea occurred to him to tell Jan openly what he had discovered, and give him a chance to clear himself at once, or to fly and hide. But his conscience, sternly upright, would not allow him even this loophole of escape.

Presently he found himself speculating as to how Jan could possibly have committed such a deed, and

obliterated all traces of himself so completely that suspicion had never even come near him. How could he have been at Good Hope that evening without any one seeing him? Certainly it was a very lonely place, and that had been a terribly hot day, when no one had gone out till after sun-down. He might have come and gone along the shore without meeting a soul.

And perhaps it was not Jan, after all. There was always that lurking hope, though faint, that by some extraordinary coincidence Miss Lisle's *fiancé* might have been another man of the same name and general appearance—perhaps a cousin to this one; or, on the other hand, that Miss Lisle's unknown informant and the murdered man were not, after all, one and the same. Only Reginald felt convinced that they were.

If he could but have confided his trouble to some trustworthy friend—Mr. Robertson, for instance—it would have lightened his burden immensely; but that he could not do. It would be dishonourable, and therefore impossible, to lay on any other living being the miserable responsibility which fate had forced upon him. He must either keep silence or invoke the law; there was no other choice.

With such thoughts for bedfellows he lay wakeful until daylight, and then fell into an exhausted slumber. Jan did not wake him, and he slept till late.

When he awoke, old Leentje brought him his breakfast, and told him that the Baas had gone out, but would come back before long to dress him and move him to the couch. He had left strict orders that the house was to be kept quiet, so that Reginald's sleep should not be disturbed. Reginald could not help being touched by his considerate kindness, and he wondered again if it could be compatible with brutality and crime.

His mind was clearer this morning, and he felt that he could think over the matter more calmly and dispassionately; but he had no opportunity at present, for Jan came in while he was eating his breakfast, evidently anxious to know if he was better, and full of small attentions and cares. He had borrowed from somewhere a large soft cushion, which he said would make the couch twice as comfortable, and he had sent a boy down to Petrusville on horseback to bring fresh books from the library. Reginald thanked him with thorough appreciation of his thoughtfulness, and wondered more and more within himself what sort of a man this was; and could not help liking him, in spite of himself.

He was only just dressed and settled on his couch by the window when, to his great delight, he saw Mr. Robertson's cart driving up.

Mrs. Robertson's conscience was already pricking her, because she had left her charge motherless for nearly

four days; and it pricked her still more when she noticed that he was not looking so well as when she left him. In reply to her inquiries, Reginald hastened to set her mind at rest. He assured her that Jan had been most attentive, and that he had wanted for nothing.

"The truth is, Mrs. Robertson," he said frankly, "that some news I received from home yesterday vexed and worried me more than it should have done, perhaps, and I had a wakeful night. That is all, and I shall soon get over it."

"Well, these accidents will occur sometimes," said Mrs. Robertson, cheerfully. "The worries won't wait till we feel well enough to battle with them; they come along when we are least fit for them."

Reginald laughed, and was cheered. He was extremely glad to have Mrs. Robertson back again, and it was an untold relief to have a third person in the house, instead of being perpetually *tête-à-tête* with Jan; for, reason with himself as he would, he could not get rid of his first conviction that Jan was Miss Lisle's lover and Van der Riet's murderer. If it were not so, the chain of coincidences would border on the miraculous.

Nevertheless, he would not allow himself to brood over the idea, and he made steady progress towards recovery. A fortnight passed away very quietly, and

then came a letter from Mrs. Carson, written immediately on receiving the news of her son's accident.

It was not a letter full of lamentations, mourning, and woe—far from it. It was a loving, motherly, sympathetic letter, written solely to cheer and encourage the sufferer, and expressing thankfulness that he was in the care of kind friends. With it came a letter to Mrs. Robertson, most warm and cordial in its expressions of gratitude, and—just a little bit condescending. Mrs. Robertson did not mind that at all; she could read well enough the sweet, sincere nature of the woman through the thin veil of conventionality and class prejudice, and she smiled pleasantly over her letter as she observed to Reginald—

“You have the right sort of mother, any one can see, Mr. Carson.”

“I think there must be more than one right sort,” observed Reginald, “for you are not a bit like my mother, and you are the right sort too.”

He had never spoken so affectionately to her before, and Mrs. Robertson was touched by his manner. For the first time, thinking of May, a fleeting wish crossed her mind that circumstances could have allowed this singularly pure-minded and attractive young fellow to become her son; but the thought was banished as soon as it came, being of a thing impossible.

CHAPTER VIII.

JAN was very clever with his hands. He manufactured a pair of crutches for Reginald, with the help of which the latter was able to move about before he had recovered the use of his leg. The fracture, however, was healing most satisfactorily, and the doctor assured him that he would feel no permanent ill effects from it.

Matters having advanced so far, Mrs. Robertson again left her patient for a visit to her home; Reginald, indeed, urged her to return home altogether, for he was quite conscience-stricken at having kept her so long away from her children and her duties.

The day after she left, Jan being out in the morning, Reginald was exercising himself on his crutches about the house and the stoep. He had tired himself somewhat, and returned to the sitting-room feeling rather lonely and restless. His eye fell upon a half-opened drawer in a little table, which he had not previously known to contain a drawer. Just inside it were several photographs tumbled together in a

heap. Reginald was rather fond of looking at photographs, and these looked as if they were very old-fashioned, and perhaps amusing. He let himself down into a chair, pulled the drawer a little further out, took the bundle of photographs, and began rather listlessly to turn them over.

They were old and faded for the most part, in ugly dresses, not old-fashioned enough to be picturesque. Some of them were coloured people, and Reginald wondered if they were Jan's own relations.

Presently he picked up one that suddenly attracted his attention. A startled look came into his eyes, his lips parted, his cheeks flushed. He uttered an exclamation aloud—an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. It was a copy of the photograph of his uncle, which was the sole aid to his search that he had brought with him from England.

Had he then here, where he had least expected it, come to the end of his wanderings? Was Jan Vermaak the man, of all men, to tell him what he had come so far to know? Having this portrait in his possession, he must be able to tell him something of the man whom it represented. So thought Reginald, and his heart beat quickly with anticipation; no glimmering of the real truth dawned upon his mind. He was thinking of the delight of writing to his mother to

tell her that he was at last successful, of her delight in reading his words, when Jan's voice broke upon his dreams.

"What old lumber have you unearthed now, Carson?" he asked, coming to his side.

"How did you come by this photograph?" asked Reginald, abruptly, holding it towards him.

Jan bent over to look at it. "That is my father," he said quietly.

"Your *father*?" said Reginald.

"Yes. Of course it is a very old photograph, taken when he was quite a young man, before he married—before he left England, even. Why do you ask?"

Reginald would not give himself time to think. "It is my uncle," he said, very quietly too.

"Your uncle!" exclaimed Jan, in his turn astonished.

Reginald put his hand into an inside pocket and took out a pocket-book. From one of its recesses he drew an old photograph, which he laid on the table beside the one that Jan said was his father. They were two copies of the same; there was no doubt about it.

Jan's face grew perplexed. He pulled a chair towards him and sat down beside Reginald, his eyes still fixed on the photographs.

"Explain this to me, Carson," he said abruptly.

Reginald spoke deliberately, weighing his words. "I have never told you," he said, "what was my object in coming out to this country. It was to try and find some trace of my uncle—my mother's only brother—who came out here twenty-seven years ago, and has not been heard of for twenty-five. None of the efforts made at that time to find him were successful. None of mine have been successful—until now. If that man is your father, and you can prove it, you and I are first cousins."

He did not look at Jan. He sat with his elbow on the table, his head resting on his hand.

"In the beginning of last year," he continued, after a short pause, "my grandfather—my uncle's father—died. He had always clung to the idea that his son was still alive and would be found. In his will he made him his heir; or, should it be proved that he was dead, and should he have left a son, his son was to be the heir."

"He is dead," said Jan; "he died five years ago. Tell me what his name was—I never knew."

"His real name is Fairbank," said Reginald. "Your name is John Fairbank—Sir John Fairbank, if your father is dead."

"Why Sir John?" asked Jan, opening his eyes.

"Because you are an English baronet," replied

Reginald, quietly. "My grandfather was a baronet, and the title would have descended to his eldest son, had he survived him. Since, as it seems, he is dead, it comes to you, together with a large property in the west of England."

Jan listened to this speech with wide, incredulous eyes. At its conclusion he invoked the Deity in forcible Dutch.

"Well, this is the queerest start," he said at last; "but why on earth did not your grandfather leave it all to you? It would have been much better. Or is the estate entailed?"

"No, it is not entailed," replied Reginald; "it is left, as I told you, by will. My grandfather was a very just man, and as long as he had not the certainty of his son's death without issue, he would not leave the property away out of the direct line."

"And did he tell you to come out here and look for your uncle?" asked Jan.

"Oh no," said Reginald, simply; "that was my own idea. My mother even did not wish it."

Jan looked at him hard, as if he were trying to understand some new kind of being.

"What a rum fellow you are, Carson!" he said—"the rummest I ever knew. But I know now who it is you have always reminded me of. It is my father. You

look very like him sometimes, but I never could think of it before."

And then it flashed into Reginald's mind what that haunting resemblance was that he had so often seen in Jan. It was a resemblance to his own dear mother. The thought had never come near his mind before—it could not, possibly; now it brought with it a sick shudder of conviction. He would not speak of it, and there was another pause, which Jan broke by saying—

"I suppose I shall have to prove my identity?"

"You will have to prove your identity," said Reginald, slowly, "to my own satisfaction and that of my lawyers. If you are really my cousin, I do not suppose there will be much difficulty in proving it."

"No," said Jan; "but if it comes to a question of lawyers, they will ferret out every mortal thing about me. So it will save trouble if I tell you the truth at once, which otherwise I should not have done."

Reginald's heart sank within him, for he knew that his worst fears were now to be realized; but he said nothing, and Jan went on—

"My father always told me," he said, "that he belonged to a good English family. He owned that he had behaved badly to his father, and had run away from home. He would never tell me his real name, though I often asked him, but always called himself

Vermaak. When he first came out he stayed in Capetown for a year or two, earning his living as a carpenter, for which he had a natural turn. Then he thought he might do better in a smaller place, and he came to Port Elizabeth, which was a much smaller place then than it is now, and set up for himself. It must have been then that he left off writing to his people, because he married a Kafir woman."

Reginald neither moved nor spoke. If he had looked at Jan then he would have seen a curious look, half regretful, half defiant, in his blue eyes.

Presently he continued, "My mother is a pure Kafir, the daughter of a chief. My father paid for her, according to custom, several cows. I was their first child, and my father's favourite, partly, I think, because I am white. He gave me a good education, and was very particular that I should speak and write English perfectly. He generally spoke English to me; and my mother can speak and understand it too, though she usually speaks Kafir or Dutch."

"Excuse me, Jan," said Reginald, interrupting him, "and do not be offended with me for asking the question. Were your father and mother legally married?"

"Yes, I believe so," said Jan, not in the least offended; "at least, I have my father's word for it.

They were married in the Dutch Church—my mother was baptized first—and I have no doubt we can find it all in the registers. I suppose cows don't count in England?" he added dryly.

Reginald smiled, in spite of his heavy heart. "Your mother is still living?" he said, with some constraint.

"Yes," said Jan; "she is living in Port Elizabeth. I have five brothers and sisters. They are very dark, and only one is nearly as white as I am."

He spoke again in a defiant tone, and Reginald felt a strange pity rising in his breast—pity both for Jan and for himself. He spoke very gently.

"Is not one of your sisters living with you here?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jan; "I like to have one of them with me. The two boys are being educated at the Kafir Institute. The girls will go to school later on."

"You are well off, Jan, it seems to me?" said Reginald, questioningly.

"My father was very well off when he died," replied Jan; "he gave up his carpentering business years ago, and went up to the diamond fields. He was very lucky there, and made a heap of money; but my mother never cared to lead a different life, and my father took pleasure in saving the money for me. He left everything to me, except a provision for my

mother, and he charged me with the support and education of the other children."

"And he left nothing to them?"

"Oh, he knew I should give them everything they want," said Jan, carelessly. "I shall let them have their share of money when they are old enough to know how to use it."

"What caused your father's death?" asked Reginald. He would not say "my uncle."

"Inflammation of the lungs," replied Jan. "He was only forty-six."

There was another silence—a longer one this time. Then Reginald picked up his crutches and stood up.

"Well," he said, "I will write home to my solicitors by next mail, and as soon as I am able to travel we must go down to Port Elizabeth together and try to make everything clear. Was your father in the habit of employing any solicitors there?"

"Yes, I believe he did once or twice," said Jan; "but I don't suppose they know any more about him than I do."

He assisted Reginald back to his couch, and then went out again to attend to his work. Reginald was left to his own reflections.

At first his thoughts seemed to whirl in confusion; but in a short time he gained control over them, and

began to review the situation calmly, allowing his mind to dwell on each point of importance in turn.

In the first place, it was clear to him that his mother must be told the truth as to Jan's parentage. To weave such a tissue of lies as to deceive her might be possible for Jan, but for himself, never. On the other hand, it was not necessary to proclaim the truth to the world. If Jan wished it, outsiders could be left in ignorance. He could not tell how Jan felt about it, but he recognized the fact that he was good to his mother and to his brothers and sisters, and was glad of it.

How he was to break the news to his mother he did not pause to think just then, nor even whether he should say anything to her about it until he had arrived at absolute certainty. That would be a serious question when he had to consider it; but a question even more serious now occupied his attention. What was his duty with respect to the murder of Van der Riet and Jan's possible—nay, probable guilt?

It required but little thought to show Reginald in what an invidious position any disclosure on his part would now place him.

Immediately on discovering that Jan is his cousin, and heir to his grandfather's property, he accuses him of a crime which, if proved, effectually deprives him of

his inheritance for ever. If not proved, Reginald himself might even lie under the suspicion of forming a base design to supplant him. In any case, his proceeding must bring public disgrace upon his whole family, and break his mother's heart.

If Jan were to suffer the extreme penalty of the law, he would probably leave the property to his next brother, who was, by all accounts, a little black boy, and would certainly never be received in English society, his brother having died a felon's death.

Was ever, thought Reginald, an honest and innocent man placed in such a painful predicament, and at the same time utterly precluded from asking any one's advice or assistance?

Either he must take upon himself the grave responsibility of allowing a murderer to go free, and to take a prominent and responsible position in English society, because he was his cousin; or else, by accusing his cousin of murder, he must bring public disgrace upon the whole family, in which he himself and his mother must bear the principal share. His strict integrity shrank from the one course; every refined and sensitive instinct of his nature revolted from the other.

The problem appeared to him lifelong; he saw no other alternative. Either the perpetual secret reproof of his conscience, or the lasting opprobrium of the guilt

of bloodshed in the face of the world. The only escape lay in the possibility that Jan was not indeed his cousin, but of that he had no moral doubt; or in the possibility that Jan had not committed the murder, and that could only be proved by making the matter public.

If Reginald became Jan's accuser, whether Jan were guilty or innocent, he, Reginald, could never hold up his head before the world again. He must go into lifelong exile, and his mother would be broken-hearted.

The thought of how much his mother had to suffer drew from him a bitter sigh. She was the being he loved best on earth, and he had to give her pain. He had never done so yet, he had never dreamed of having to do so. For the first time he wished that he had never left her side, never started forth on this fatal quest. Better far for her to have remained for ever in ignorance of her brother's fate, than to attain a knowledge so fraught with grief and shame.

Weary with thought, he leaned back and closed his eyes, and through his tired brain meandered over and over two lines of Tennyson, familiar to him long ago, but which had never until now conveyed any meaning to him—

“And Time, a maniac, scattering dust,
And Life, a fury, slinging flame.”

CHAPTER IX.

IN the evening Reginald resumed his conversation with Jan, but to little purpose. Jan having, under the pressure of necessity, told the truth as far as he knew it, shrank back into impenetrable reserve. His father, he said, had never told him anything about his English home or his own people, and had never intended to have any further communication with them.

“But he must have known that the title and property would come to him,” observed Reginald.

“I suppose he did not wish for them,” replied Jan, briefly, and turned the conversation by giving a description of his father’s personal appearance. This was not of much use, as Reginald had never set eyes on him; but he came to the conclusion that John Fairbank and his sister must have been very much alike, and that the likeness had been reproduced both in himself and Jan.

He could not help respecting the pride which kept

Jan silent. Jan knew, of course, that Reginald looked upon his uncle's marriage as a deep and lasting disgrace, and a calamity to the whole family. There was no doubt that John Fairbank had deliberately effaced himself in order that the property might pass to another branch of the family. He knew that he might, and probably would, have a black son, or a black grandson, who would be quite unfit for the position of a respectable English baronet, and, most likely, not at all desirous of it. He thought to hide himself and his shame from the world of his past for ever; and Reginald heartily wished that his fine sense of honour had never enticed him into raking up these dead embers and setting a fresh spark to them. Jan himself was practically white, and would pass for such in English society; but Jan would probably marry, and have a son who was as likely as not to be coal black, and who, in justice and equity, must succeed his father.

However, the thing was done, and could not be undone; and Reginald had yet that other question to settle with his conscience.

As for Jan, he preserved a stoical demeanour, but raged inwardly with wounded pride. He knew well enough that he was a pariah to the white man. He even acknowledged that it was but natural that it should

be so ; none the less, he suffered torments. . He never dreamed for a moment that Reginald had known or suspected the intermixture of blood when he announced to him that he was his cousin and an English aristocrat ; he naturally concluded that if Reginald had known the first fact, he would certainly have suppressed the second. It was what he would have done himself in like circumstances.

Reginald passed another wakeful night, but it was not without results. He had faced the fact that in this matter he had to rely entirely on his own judgment, and to decide for himself without any human assistance. His was not a vacillating mind, and once his decision was made he was not likely to go back from it.

The next day was Saturday, and early in the afternoon Ralph Robertson and May drove over to visit the invalid and report progress. It was not the first time that May had been to see Reginald ; her father had brought her three or four times, and Reginald had always enjoyed their visits. May had her mother's even temper, with a greater share of vivacity and animation.

The sight of Reginald on his crutches, however, rather shocked her, and she observed also that he looked grave and harassed. She took occasion to ask him the reason when Ralph and Jan were gone outside to examine

Ralph's horses, which were still suffering from the effects of the accident.

Reginald was back on his couch, and May was sitting opposite to him. They conversed with the familiarity of old friends.

"It will be a relief to me to tell you what it is that worries me, Miss Robertson," he said, in answer to her inquiry, "although it is of no use to speak openly of it at present. Something has happened which greatly affects my life, and all the lives most near to mine. I have found out about my uncle."

May said nothing, but her face flashed into intense, sympathetic interest.

Reginald continued, "I have found out that—beyond any reasonable doubt—my uncle died in Port Elizabeth five years ago, leaving several children, of whom Jan Vermaak is the eldest, and therefore the heir whom I have been seeking. Vermaak is the name my uncle assumed; Jan's real name is John Fairbank."

"Jan Vermaak!" exclaimed May; "but I thought——" She paused suddenly.

"That he had coloured blood in his veins," said Reginald, quietly completing the sentence for her. "So he has, Miss Robertson. His mother is a Kafir woman; but I have every reason to believe that my uncle was legally married to her."

There was a minute's silence, and then May spoke in a low voice.

"Oh, Mr. Carson!" she said, "I am indeed sorry for you. What a terrible misfortune! But how did you find this out? May there not be some mistake?"

Reginald told her about the photographs, and related the substance of his conversations with Jan.

May owned that the evidence was convincing. "Still, there may be some flaw," she said; "and—I don't think Mr. Vermaak is always particular about the truth."

"I know he isn't," said Reginald, dryly; "but in this instance I think he spoke truth, nevertheless. When he said that the photograph was his father, he had no motive for lying, for he had no idea that anything depended on it. And afterwards, as he remarked himself, it was of no use to conceal anything, because the lawyers would find it out."

Reginald's belief in human nature was not what it had been. As Mrs. Robertson had once said to him, knowledge of the world was only too easily learned.

"I suppose you are right," said May, with a sigh. "It is a great calamity, if it is so. I know that I should feel it so; and for you, in your position, it is a thousand times worse."

"It is a wicked thing," said Reginald, sadly. "How could an Englishman, with generations of noble

ancestors, with such a father as my grandfather, and such a sister as my mother, descend so low as to choose for a life companion an ignorant, uncivilized negro woman? It seems incredible."

"It does seem incredible," said May; "but we must believe it, because we often see it. Shall you tell your mother, Mr. Carson?"

"I must," said Reginald. "How could I manufacture such a fabric of lies as to deceive her? And then, the truth would leak out. I *must* tell her, that is the worst of it."

His lips quivered a little, and May looked down to avoid showing that she perceived his emotion. She was strongly moved herself, for she felt his trouble almost as if it had been her own.

"What does Mr. Vermaak say about it himself?" she asked presently, to change the subject a little.

"Scarcely anything," replied Reginald. "I fear that he knows only too well how I feel about it, and that he is very sore about it. I have not said one word to hurt him, but how can I pretend to be glad?"

"You could not," said May, recognizing how impossible it was for Reginald to pretend anything. "And if you did, no one would believe you. All white people would feel the same."

Just then they saw Jan and Ralph returning to the

house, and the subject was at once dropped. After they had all had coffee together, Ralph had his cart spanned in, for the days were short now, and it was growing dark.

When May took leave of Reginald, he held her hand for a moment.

"Come again soon, Miss Robertson. It is such a pleasure to me to see you."

"Yes, I will," said May, looking down at him with frank, friendly eyes; "and mother will be sure to want to come too. I dare say father will bring us on Monday."

Reginald felt very lonely when they were gone, for there was a good deal of constraint now between himself and Jan. He had a bad fit of home-sickness, too, and could not work it off, as he usually did, by writing to his mother.

May was, of course, at liberty to tell her father and mother what she had heard, and she did so that same evening when they were sitting together, Ralph being also present. Their sympathy was fully as keen as her own.

"Well, I call that the hardest luck," exclaimed Ralph.

"So it is," said his father; "to think that all that honourable young fellow's devoted efforts to find the

man who should supplant him must be rewarded in this way."

"I always feared," said Mrs. Robertson, "that if he should ever succeed in finding his uncle, the discovery might bring to light some shame that had better remain hid; but I never dreamed that it would be so bad as this."

"It is an indelible stain on the family that can never be effaced or forgotten," said Mr. Robertson. "The black blood will show itself here and there for generations to come, and no one ever knows where it will appear. Besides, it is not only the colour, it is the characteristics, the tendencies, that belong to the type. Jan Vermaak has many good qualities; but compare him for a moment with Reginald Carson."

"It is all the difference between a principled man and an unprincipled," said Mrs. Robertson.

"It is a wicked shame!" said May, indignantly; "to think that a man who has been well brought up, and knows what is right, can deliberately bring such disgrace and misery on a number of innocent people for years after he himself is dead."

"And for what?" said Ralph. "Surely he cannot have had any real happiness with a Kafir wife. They could not have had one thought in common."

“Still, to do him justice,” said Mrs. Robertson, “he seems to have been always faithful to her.”

“Yes ; and we must remember,” added her husband, “that he did his best to disappear, and to leave the property for those who deserved it better. He could not have reckoned either on the constant affection of his father, or the ultra-honourable instincts of his nephew.”

“No. It is a remarkable chain of events and coincidences, when you come to think of it,” said Ralph, thoughtfully.

“People say that good comes out of evil,” said May ; “but it seems to me that evil often comes out of good, too.”

“Ah, May,” said her mother, smiling, “you must think that each of us only sees a very small piece of life ; and all the life of the world, past and present, is one great chain of cause and effect.”

“Well, we will go over and see Carson on Monday,” said Mr. Robertson ; “but we will not introduce this subject unless he first begins it.”

It was introduced at once, however, for Jan was out when they arrived, and as soon as they were all seated, Reginald said—

“Miss Robertson has, of course, told you about my discovery and its results ? ”

“Yes, she has,” said Mr. Robertson; “and I need not tell you, Mr. Carson, that we all most heartily feel for you.”

“Thank you,” said Reginald, simply. “Well, there is no altering facts. They are inexorable, and we must accept them.”

“Have you decided what course to pursue?” asked Mrs. Robertson.

“Yes,” said Reginald, directly. “As soon as I am quite well, and the legal proofs of my cousin’s identity are established, I shall persuade him to go with me to England. He must see his property and take formal possession of it, and he must see something of English social life. Then he can judge for himself whether he will live there altogether, or return to this country, or divide his time between the two.”

“You have decided very rightly and wisely, Mr. Carson,” said Mrs. Robertson, with quiet approval.

Reginald looked up, and his eyes met May’s. He read in them complete self-forgetful sympathy, and a sincere admiration. The approval of his friends stirred his heart. Yet, he thought to himself, they did not know—they never would know—at what sacrifice his decision had been made; at the sacrifice, namely, of that absolute justice and straightforwardness which had ever been his highest standard of conduct.

He could never open his lips now on the matter of Van der Riet's death—the time was past. For the sake of others, for the sake of his mother, he had held his peace; and now he must hold it for ever. He had said to himself that he had no certain proofs of Jan's guilt, and he had deliberately resolved that he would never lift a finger to seek for them. The dead past must bury its dead—if it would.

After the Robertsons left him, the post brought him the weekly mail. His mother wrote, of course, a long, affectionate letter. In the course of it occurred this passage—

“In my last letter, dear Reginald, I was so taken up with the news of your accident that I never even noticed the name of the gentleman in whose house you are laid up. What a strange coincidence that it should be the same name as that of Miss Lisle's mysterious lover! Surely it cannot be the same man? I should not like to think so, for it would make me feel uneasy about you. But I have no doubt it is a very common Dutch name, and that you will laugh at my foolish fancy.”

Reginald laid down the letter with a sigh. He had never felt less inclined to laugh in his life, for he had to answer it.

CHAPTER X.

THIS was the letter that Reginald wrote to his mother:—

“MY DEAREST MOTHER,

“It grieves me that I should have to write to you this week what must also grieve you; but as it has to be done, I will do it in as few words as possible.

“I have, as I believe, come to the end of my quest, and have found out what I have every reason to think is the truth about my uncle and his career out here; but what I have learned, dear mother, I must tell you at once, can only bring us shame and sorrow.

“My uncle is not living; he died in Port Elizabeth five years ago of inflammation of the lungs. I have received from the solicitors with whom I communicated in Port Elizabeth a copy of the certificate of his death. He is spoken of as John Fairbank, *alias* Jan Vermaak, and his age was forty-six. Jan Vermaak was his

assumed name, and this strange coincidence I must now explain to you.

“It was quite by accident that I discovered, a short time ago, that Jan Vermaak, in whose house I am still a guest, possessed a photograph exactly similar to that one of my uncle which you gave me when I left home. It is, in fact, a copy of the same. When I asked him how he came by it, he replied without hesitation that it was an old photograph of his father, taken, as he believed, before he left England. I had heard before this that Jan’s father was an Englishman, but I had never said one word to him about my uncle, or my search for him. I should have thought him the last person in the world to be able to help me. I showed him my own copy of the photograph, and told him who it was, when his surprise equalled mine. We then had a long conversation, from which I learned the following facts concerning my uncle’s life in this country. I wish I could keep them from you, mother, but I know it would not be right.

“My uncle lived for two years in Capetown, working as a carpenter. That was, I suppose, the time during which he still continued to write home. At the end of two years he moved to Port Elizabeth, where he continued the same occupation. This was when his letters ceased, evidently, though I do not know whether it

was then that he assumed a Dutch name, or whether he had done so from the first. The reason of his disappearance is a very sad and a very shameful one, but I fear there is no possible doubt about it. He married a Kafir woman, by whom he had six children, of whom this Jan Vermaak is the eldest.

“I had at first hopes that the marriage might prove to be illegal, should my uncle have married under his assumed name; but it is not so. The solicitors have sent me also a copy of the register of the marriage of John Fairbank and Nampetu—that is his wife’s name—which took place in the Dutch Church at Port Elizabeth, twenty-five years ago. The minister who performed the ceremony, and his brother, who was the only witness, are both, I have ascertained, long since dead.

“It is therefore plain that this Jan Vermaak, whose real name is John Fairbank, is the legal heir to my grandfather’s title and property, and that I have only done my duty in telling him so, and in giving him every opportunity to prove his claim. It is a bitter trouble to me, but the worst part of it is to know how much bitterer it will be to you. How I wish I could have shielded you from it, mother, but I am powerless in the face of facts, and can only do what appears right and just.

“In some ways, perhaps, the situation might be—

worse. My uncle, you see, tried to spare us this calamity by effacing himself altogether. He could never have supposed that we should succeed in finding his son. It is also right to remember that he did not attempt to deceive his wife by a false marriage, as no doubt he might easily have done, and that he always remained faithful to her. Moreover, their marriage was preceded by her conversion and baptism. She herself is, from what I hear, a superior native, a pure Kafir, and the daughter of a chief, which is, I suppose, better than being of mixed race. As soon as I am able to travel I shall go to Port Elizabeth, and shall then make a point of seeing her and the other children.

“Jan himself is white—fair-haired and blue-eyed. You would not know that he had any coloured blood in him. He is a very fine-looking, handsome fellow, and has many good qualities. His kindness to me, when believing me to be a perfect stranger, was unbounded, and I can never forget it. Moreover, I feel very sorry for him, for I am sure, though he has never said so to me, that he is quite aware that his parentage is considered a disgrace, and that he feels it keenly under the present circumstances. It is not his fault, and it is very hard that he should have to suffer for it; harder still that we should all have to suffer; hardest of all for you, mother.

“He has been well educated, and speaks English as well as I do. My uncle seems to have done his best for all his children. He went up to the diamond fields for a time, and made a good deal of money there. Jan is well off; he has bought this farm, and also, I believe, supports and educates his brothers and sisters. I think he is very fond of his family, and very good to them.

“I think you will agree with me, dear mother, that the right course to pursue is to bring Jan with me to England, if he will come, and let him judge for himself as to his future mode of life. That is the one bright spot in this miserable business, that now I can return home and be with you again. When I next write to you I hope I may be able to tell you with certainty the time of my return. That, at least, is something to look forward to.

“There is one other thing I must speak of before I close this letter. You asked me if Jan was the same who was for a time engaged to Miss Lisle. I do not *know*, and of course I cannot ask him, at least I should not like to do so; but I fear it is very likely. In any case, it will be best to avoid a meeting between him and Miss Lisle, should he come to England, and not to mention her name before him, if it can be helped. This for the present, anyway, and for the future we must provide when we see our way more clearly.

“And now I must close this letter, dearest mother, wishing, how earnestly, that it need never have been written. Comfort yourself with this thought, that, come what may, I shall soon be able to be with you now, and shall not have to leave you again.

“Ever your loving son,

“REGINALD CARSON.”

CHAPTER XI.

A GLORIOUS June day on the South African coast is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Sea, earth and sky are flooded with unbroken sunshine—not the glaring, fierce sun of summer, but the warm, genial, joyous sun of a temperate winter, accompanied with just that touch of crispness in the air which is one of the charms of a fine autumn day in England, and which makes all the difference between an invigorating and an enervating warmth.

On just such a perfect day, Jan Fairbank, as he must now be called, and Reginald Carson were walking together along the streets of Port Elizabeth—Reginald walking somewhat stiffly, but otherwise quite recovered. They had just left the Dutch church, where Reginald had looked with his own eyes on the faded register of the marriage of John Fairbank and Nampetu, on the handwriting of his dead uncle, and the cross which was all that his Kafir wife could attain to by way of a signature.

Like all sensitive people, Reginald was keenly alive to influences of weather and temperature ; but on this life-giving morning he was too unhappily preoccupied to be accessible to any benign influence from without ; his mental horizon was dark and cloudy.

Few words passed between himself and his cousin as they walked on, leaving the more fashionable and busy quarter of the town behind, and threading the quieter and less pretentious streets towards the North End. Presently, in a clean and retired side street, in front of a tidy little one-storied cottage, Jan came to a pause.

There were two children playing in front of the door. One was a little boy about nine years old, a thorough little Kafir from the crown of his woolly black head to the soles of his nimble black feet. The other was a little girl about two years younger, with a white skin and fair curly hair, but with an unmistakably flat nose and thick lips. Both children sprang up, when they saw Jan, with screams of delight, which quickly subsided, when they perceived his companion, into shy but friendly smiles. Jan stooped down and kissed the little girl, patted the boy on the head, and then passed on into the cottage without a word, followed by Reginald.

The cottage was as neat and clean within as without, and was furnished like an English cottage of the same

class. There were muslin curtains to the window, and flowers on the sill; a little stove stood in the fireplace, and the floor was partly covered with cocoa-nut matting. Reginald remembered all these things afterwards, though he was not aware that he noticed them at the time.

A tall and very graceful Kafir woman came to meet them. Her skin was extremely black; her hair, almost hidden by a coloured handkerchief, was like the finest black wool; her large eyes were of the darkest shade of brown; her form, in its lithe and undulating grace, was perfect. Although her features were of the most marked negro type, her countenance bore, in repose, an expression of mild and dignified sadness, often noticeable in the faces of a subject race, and which gave it a certain beauty independent of type.

Jan went up to her and took her hand. "Mother," he said, speaking in English, "this is my cousin, Reginald Carson."

Reginald bowed to her in exactly the same manner as he would have done to a duchess, and readily clasped the slim black fingers that Nampetu extended to him. She smiled very pleasantly, showing two rows of beautiful, even, white teeth, and, with a motion of her hand, requested him to be seated. Reginald sat down, and contemplated his aunt and cousins with a helpless sense of the irretrievable.

The children were all there. Jan, fair-haired and handsome, with a thoroughly European cast of countenance, seemed in no way to belong to the company. Next to him was a girl of eighteen, who was exactly what her mother must have been at the same age, when John Fairbank the elder took her to wife. Then came a boy of fourteen, equally dark-skinned, with a fine muscular development. Next to him was the little girl whom Reginald had already seen on the farm; and lastly, the two who had been playing in the doorway. The only one of the children, besides Jan, who was fair was the youngest girl, and she had the negro features.

There was a rather awkward pause after Reginald's introduction, which was broken by Nampetu, who had seated herself opposite to him.

"When I look at Mr. Carson," she said, speaking very fair English, "I see again my husband when he was young."

"I think Jan must be very like him, too," said Reginald, pleasantly.

"Yes, Jan is like his father, too," she replied, looking with some pride upon her eldest-born; and then, drawing the youngest child towards her, she continued, "I will tell you the names of all my children, that you may know them."

She enumerated them in the order of their ages.

The three girls had Dutch names—Gesina, the eldest, Jannetje, and Jacova. The two boys had Kafir names—Mbangwe and Nordol. Reginald found them equally difficult to remember.

They all came up to him and shook hands in turn, and he responded kindly to their broad, beaming smiles and polite greetings. His manner was perfect; not the slightest outward sign betrayed his sickness of heart.

When the ice was once broken, Reginald found it easier to converse than he had expected. Nampetu understood English perfectly, and could speak it sufficiently well. Jan had told her all about Reginald, and had prepared her for his visit. She began to talk to him about her husband.

“It is kind of you to come so far to seek your uncle,” she said. “He never thought, nor wished, that any of his people should seek him again. He took another name, and wished to be as another man.”

“Yes. But, you see,” said Reginald, “there is land and money that would belong to him if he were alive, and that belongs to his son, since he himself is dead. So it was right that I should seek him.”

“*You* should have had the land and the money,” said Nampetu, smiling at him, “because you are English. It would be better.”

“It does not belong to me,” said Reginald; “it

would not be just for me to have it. My grandfather wished his son to have it, and his son's son."

"You are not his son's son?" asked Nampetu.

"No, I am his daughter's son," replied Reginald. "He had no son except your husband."

"My husband was a rich man when he died," said Nampetu. "Jan has plenty of money."

"Well, he will have more now," said Reginald; "and a large piece of land in England besides."

Nampetu shook her head slowly, and murmured some exclamation in Kafir. Jan, meanwhile, had gone into another room, and Gesina, the eldest girl, had also disappeared.

"I want you to help me," said Reginald to Nampetu, "to persuade Jan to go to England with me. I do not think he wants to go, but I am sure he ought to go. He ought to see his land, and take possession of it. He ought to know—my mother, and his other English relations."

Nampetu shook her head again. "It is a long way to England," she said.

"Yes. But a great many people go and come by every steamer," said Reginald, smiling; "and they go very quickly now. I do not suppose Jan would like to live in England always. He would want to come back to his own country and to you, of course. But

I think he ought to be sometimes in England, as a piece of it belongs to him."

"No," said Nampetu; "he will be despised by the white people for his mother's sake. I will not persuade him to go. If he wants to go, I will say nothing to him; he shall go."

She did not speak angrily, only gravely and with decision. Reginald was completely taken aback, and found no words to reply to her. To his unspeakable relief, Gesina returned at this moment with coffee on a tray. It was nicely served, everything was scrupulously clean, and the very fact that there was nothing to find fault with, added to an unreasonable sense of self-reproach which had suddenly fastened upon Reginald. Why had he come to see these people, when they knew so well that he loathed his connection with them? There was no thought in his mind of patronage or condescension, but no doubt his visit appeared to them in that light. The coffee, which was excellent, nearly choked him. He racked his brains for another subject of conversation, and presently it occurred to him.

"I often wonder," he said to Nampetu, "that your husband was able to hide himself for so many years. His father tried so hard to find him. He put notices in all the papers, and employed lawyers out here."

“I did not know it,” said Nampetu, simply; “he never told me. But I know that when we were married he gave money to the minister and his brother, and made them swear that they would never tell any one his real name. No one else knew it, but only I.”

Jan had returned during this conversation, and listened with interest. He had scarcely spoken a word himself since they came in, and now he only opened his lips to ask Reginald if he was ready to go. Reginald showed no undue alacrity. He first thanked Gesina for the coffee, and made her smile brilliantly by telling her it was the best he had ever tasted; then he rose deliberately, and bade farewell to each of his cousins in turn, to his aunt last.

Nampetu gave him her hand again, and took leave of him in quite a friendly and cordial manner.

“I am pleased that you came,” she said. “You make me think so much of my husband.”

Once outside, Reginald recovered himself somewhat. He knew that he had nothing really to reproach himself with; and he had performed a very trying duty, which he had no reason to think he should ever need to perform again. He drew a breath of relief, and started a conversation with Jan on indifferent subjects.

He anticipated some difficulty in persuading Jan to

go to England with him, but he encountered more than he expected. Jan at first flatly refused to entertain the idea at all.

“I cannot leave my farm and my work out here,” he said. “I must empower you to look after the property in England for me.”

“But,” urged Reginald, “the property in England is just as much yours as the land out here, and it is quite as important that you should look after it. There are farms on it, too—more than one. And you could surely find some one to take charge of your farm out here, at all events for a time.”

“I know nothing of English farming, or the way to manage an English estate,” said Jan.

“All the more reason that you should go home and learn,” replied Reginald, “as you are an English landlord. Otherwise, how are you to know that I, or any one else, shall manage your estate properly, and make the most of it?”

“I am sure I could not live in England,” said Jan. “Neither the climate nor the way of life would suit me. I am not fitted for it.”

“That is very likely,” replied Reginald, quietly; “but I am not asking you to live in England. I want you to go to England for a few months to take possession of your rights, and to make your own

arrangements as you shall think fit; to make acquaintance with your father's people, and to give English life at least a trial."

Jan contemplated him with a certain curiosity. "You are an extraordinary fellow, Reginald," he said, after a pause. "I begin to believe that you really *wish* me to go to England with you."

"Of course I really wish it," said Reginald, surprised. "Why should I urge you to go if I did not wish it? And why should you only now begin to believe me? Have I ever given you any reason to disbelieve me?"

"No. Except that I cannot imagine any earthly reason why you should wish me to go with you."

"I have given you my reasons," said Reginald, rather curtly; "and I shall be very much disappointed if you do not go, Jan."

"Nevertheless, I am not going," replied Jan, getting up and going out of the room to put an end to the conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

THIS was one of several conversations that the two cousins had on the subject. Reginald was anxious to get home as quickly as possible, and Jan's obstinacy hindered him, therefore Reginald was persistent. He was quite sincere when he said that he really wished Jan to go. He had faced all that was involved in it; but when once he had made up his mind that a certain course was right, he had the power to make himself wish it. Of course he knew at heart what was the real cause of Jan's aversion to visit England; nevertheless, one day, when Jan had been making all sorts of lame excuses, Reginald suffered his impatience to get the better of him for a moment, and said—

“Really, Jan, you cannot expect me to accept such objections as those. They are simply frivolous.”

They were sitting together in Reginald's bedroom in the hotel where they were staying; Jan sat in a chair by the window. He leaned forward, and his face became stern and rigid.

“You know as well as I do,” he said, in a low voice, “why I will not go to England. My father’s people will despise and avoid me. They will not associate with the son of the Kafir woman.”

“Your father’s people,” said Reginald, steadily, “will treat you in exactly the same manner as they treat me. If they do not, they will have to account to me for it.”

“To *you*!” said Jan, bitterly; “to *you*, who make me feel the gulf between us every day of your life!”

“I did not know it,” said Reginald, startled; “and, indeed, I did not mean it. Jan,” he added, feeling it a relief to speak openly, “if you wish to conceal your parentage from your English relatives, they will never know it from me. My mother knows it; but neither of us will ever open our lips on the subject without your permission.”

“It would be found out,” said Jan, gloomily; “it would be found out, all the same. I tried to hide it once. That was when I loved an English girl—a fair English lady, as fair and as proud as yourself. I *loved* her—and I hid my birth from her. Yet she found it out, and she tossed me away with scorn.”

He still spoke in a low tone, but his voice quivered with passion.

Reginald felt a cold shiver run through him as his

terrible suspicions of his cousin's guilt were thus confirmed out of his own mouth.

"Listen to me," continued Jan, raising his voice a little as his passion got the mastery of him, "I used to love my father dearly. I used to think, when I was a boy, that he was very good to me. But now——" He rose, and struck his open hand against the wall. "Now," he said, "I *curse* him! I curse him for marrying my mother! I curse him for bringing me into the world! I curse him that he fitted me for a position which I can never hold! I curse him that he gave me my rights with one hand, only to take them away with the other! He *knew* that I should be hated by the Kafirs because my father was a white man! He *knew* that I should be scorned and loathed by the white men because my mother was a Kafir woman! I *curse* him because he knowingly did me this wrong! I *curse* his memory, and I will curse it with my last breath!"

He said all this so rapidly, although distinctly, that Reginald had no chance to interrupt or check him. Indeed, he sat for a moment appalled, seeing in the towering form and convulsed features before him the primeval savage, abandoning himself to his ungoverned emotions. It even occurred to him that Jan might suddenly spring upon him and strangle him with those

powerful hands, as he must have strangled that other. The next moment, however, worthier thoughts came to him. He stood up and faced his cousin.

“For shame, Jan!” he said sternly; “for shame to curse the dead who gave you life! What harm can your curses do him? They will only harm yourself. And you shall not do it. You shall not curse my mother’s own brother to my face. Do not speak to me in such a manner again.”

Reginald’s blue eyes flashed as perhaps no one had ever seen them flash before; and yet he had often been more angry than he was now. For, in spite of his stern words, his heart ached for Jan. His anger, however, had much more effect on Jan than pity or gentleness would have done. He did not, as Reginald fully expected, break forth into another outburst of passion. He turned round to the window, leaning against the side, and said nothing. Reginald went quietly out of the room.

When he met Jan again, the latter had recovered his usual quiet and reserved demeanour. Neither of them, of course, made any allusion to what had passed; but when they were going to their respective rooms that night rather late, Jan said abruptly—

“Reginald, I will go with you to England as soon as you like. We will take our passage to-morrow

morning. But I must have a day or two to run up to the farm and put things straight before I go."

"Thank you, Jan," said Reginald, quietly. "I should like to go with you, to say good-bye to the Robertsons."

"Yes. Very well, we will arrange our plans to-morrow," said Jan, in a matter-of-fact tone.

They exchanged good nights, and parted.

Reginald lay long awake pondering over this sudden transformation, but could find no reason for it in anything that had occurred. On the contrary, after the scene of to-day, he had almost given up the hope of ever persuading Jan to go with him. Truly he had no clue to the workings of that strange and wayward mind. He only perceived that he had in some way acquired an influence over his cousin which he had not hitherto possessed, and the perception troubled, while yet it relieved him. It increased both his responsibility and his opportunities.

As he turned over to sleep, he suddenly remembered what the doctor had said about looking at Jan's eyes when he was excited. He had done that to-day, and now he thought he knew what the doctor meant. A white man, however angry, did not look just like that.

Two days later, Jan and Reginald were again in Petrusville. The village was in no way altered since

the first time that Reginald had seen it, only that it was less dusty and hot on this particular day. To his eyes it was just as elementary and just as lethargic as ever, and did not seem as if it could ever become anything else. They walked down to Robertson's store, meeting the doctor on the way, who stopped to congratulate his former patient on his robust appearance. For, in spite of having a good deal on his mind, Reginald had recovered perfect health. Youth and a strong constitution are proof against a great deal of anxiety, and even the gnawings of a too sensitive conscience.

As they entered the store, Harold and Ralph came to meet them, and gave them both, but especially Reginald, a hearty welcome. Reginald remembered, with a sudden pang, that on his first introduction to them he had been aware of a certain social gap between himself and a storekeeper—a certain superiority of birth and connection in his own favour. To whom was he superior now—he, whose nearest kin, save his mother, were half Kafirs? What would he not give now to be able to make that boast that Mr. Robertson had once made to him?—"Not that there is any intermixture in my family, I am glad to say. Pure Scotch."

Jan had sent beforehand for his cart to meet them at Petrusville, and it was waiting for them. He intended

to spend the night at Brakplaat, and go on to his own farm the next day.

“They will be delighted to see you,” said Ralph to Reginald. “Father and mother are always talking about you, and the youngsters keep on asking when you are coming back.”

“I shall be delighted to see them all again,” said Reginald; and indeed his heart warmed at the thought of finding himself once more in that cheerful home circle. His mind had been so completely preoccupied lately with his own affairs and Jan’s, that his friends had had rather a small share of his thoughts; now, as he drove along the familiar road with Jan, he recalled his first drive there with Mr. Robertson, and the pleasant days that had followed. Then he reflected that he was on his way to say good-bye to them, and that it was quite possible, even likely, that he would never see them again. The thought made him very sad indeed.

As they drove up to the house they saw May sitting on the stoep. Three or four of the children were clustered round her; she was talking to them, or perhaps telling them a story, and her hands were busy at the same time with needlework. The sound of the cart-wheels disturbed the little group. The children came running to meet them, and May laid aside her work and followed them more slowly.

Reginald was the first to descend from the cart and to greet her. As he held her hand in his and looked into the clear brown eyes, he became aware of a curious tightening about the heart, and realized suddenly that it would be very hard to part with her. The sensation was entirely new to him, and he shrank from it with the instinctive shrinking of every creature from pain.

They went inside together, and Mrs. Robertson emerged from the kitchen to greet them. Her kindly familiar face was a very pleasant sight to Reginald. Everything was unchanged. The same air of homely ease and unluxurious freedom pervaded the house. The children came and went in every room, the doors all stood open to the outside, work and pleasure were carried on side by side in the same orderly disorder. Reginald could not bear to think that he might never return to it; he put the thought away from him and enjoyed the hour.

They were very friendly with Jan, too; and when they heard that he was going to England almost immediately with his cousin, there were exclamations of envy: "Lucky you!" "I wish I were in your shoes!" and so forth.

"Well," said Mr. Robertson, "it has been the great wish of my life to visit the old country, but I have never had the chance, and I hardly suppose I ever shall now."

"I hope you will yet, some day, Mr. Robertson," said Reginald, heartily. "I could not have a greater pleasure than to welcome any of you at my own home, and return some of the hospitality you have shown me."

His words came from his heart, and at the close of the sentence his eyes sought May's. She, too, was looking at him, and feeling that now there was no trace in his manner of that "superior air" which she had formerly resented. She liked him now without any reserve; yet, when their eyes met, for the first time hers fell before his, she could not have told why.

The evenings were cold now, and when it grew dark a big fire of logs was made on the open hearth. It reminded Reginald of winter nights at home.

"We have an open hearth, too," he said, "in the dining-room, and we often burn big stumps of wood there; especially about Christmas time, when we have a good many visitors."

Jan was not in the room just then, and Reginald added, after a moment's pause—

"I keep on talking about my home, but I forget that it is all Jan's now."

"Do you think that he will really live there?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"He says he never will," replied Reginald. "He

says that he wants me to remain in the house with my mother, and act as his steward and agent; but he may change his mind; and if he should, I have no right to complain."

"I do not think he would be happy living in England altogether," said Mrs. Robertson; "and the arrangement you speak of sounds much the best. You are fitted for the life and the duties of an English landlord; he is fitted for the life and work of a Cape farmer. I fancy he would always feel out of place."

"Of course I should like it best," said Reginald. "It would be very hard to leave the old place, and especially for my mother. But I shall not say a word to influence him one way or the other; I want him to judge entirely for himself."

"He is very fond of you, Mr. Carson," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Is he?" said Reginald, reflectively. "Well, he has said some very hard things to me."

After a little hesitation he went on to tell them about his visit to Jan's family, and his subsequent difficulty in persuading Jan to go home with him. He did not go into the details of that passionate scene in the bedroom, but he told enough to explain Jan's bitterness of feeling about his position in relation to the white man.

He was alone with Mrs. Robertson and May. Mr. Robertson and Jan had gone outside to smoke, and the children were in bed. Their sympathy and interest drew out his confidence, and he felt it a relief to speak of the events and trials of the last few weeks to some one who could understand and enter into his feelings.

"The more I think about it, the more sorry I feel for both of you," Mrs. Robertson said; "and really it is harder for him than for you."

"Oh, undoubtedly it is," replied Reginald, quickly. "I know that I would not be in his place for anything. I feel sometimes as if I were guilty towards him—as if my very existence were an injury to him. And I am sure he wishes heartily that I had never found him."

"And you—do you wish it too, Mr. Carson?" asked May.

Reginald hesitated a moment. "I do not know, Miss Robertson," he said at last. "I know that if all had been right I should have been *delighted* to find my cousin, and my disappointment is all the greater. Yet I cannot help feeling some satisfaction that my grandfather's last wish has been fulfilled; that I have found out what he wished so much to know, and that justice has, at least, been done."

His own words brought a sting with them of which

his hearers knew nothing. Had justice indeed been done? He turned away to end the conversation.

“James,” said Mrs. Robertson to her husband that night, “I quite agree with what you once said, that Mr. Carson is a fine character. I have never felt so much respect for so young a man.”

“Nor I,” said her husband, with emphasis.

CHAPTER XIII.

REGINALD lay awake for some time that night thinking about May Robertson. In the complete preoccupation of his mind during the last few weeks, he had not been in the least aware that she had become dear to him. Seeing her again, he knew it immediately. Improbable as it may seem, Reginald had never yet been, or fancied himself, in love. He had known very few women, very few indeed of his own age; none at all intimately, except his mother. Still more strange, he was really pure-minded, and had never occupied his thoughts with love and marriage, being quite content to wait until the passing years should bring them to him. His feelings, therefore, being fresh and unused, were all the keener when once awakened, and left him in no doubt as to their reality.

He must add this pain, then, to that which he already suffered. For he saw plainly from the first moment that his only course was to go away and try to forget her. His duty called him to England at once, and

would most probably keep him in England for many years to come, practically for the best part of his life. His acquaintance with May had been short, although intimate while it lasted; he had but one day to spend at the farm, and it was manifestly impossible for him to make a sudden and unexpected declaration of his feelings just as he was going away for good. Besides, May would not listen to him, he was certain of that; and her parents would be most unlikely to favour his suit under the circumstances. Had he been able to remain in the country, or had he seen any chance of returning to it at no very distant date, he would have wooed, and might have won her; as it was, he must simply go, and make no sign; there was no other alternative.

He came to this conclusion without any difficulty, but with a heavy heart all the same, and it was towards morning already when he slept.

He was awakened again just at daylight by loud cracks, which he at once knew to proceed from a waggon whip. They were accompanied, moreover, by those unearthly and blood-curdling yells with which waggon drivers, whether Dutchmen or natives, are wont to cheer and reanimate the spirits of their oxen. Reginald got up and went to the window, from which he had a view of the main road.

A good-sized tent-waggon was standing in front of the gate, with a span of twelve oxen. The sun, just risen, lit up the dew that sparkled on the top of the tent, and turned into a golden mist the dust that rose around the trampling hoofs of the oxen. The leader, who now squatted on the ground in front of his team, was a ragged and most disreputable-looking Hottentot; the driver was a tall, lank Dutchman, with a bushy yellow beard, and skin burnt to the same colour. His suit of light-brown cord was patched in all the most conspicuous places with some dark-blue stuff that looked like print; his enormous feet were encased in *veldtschoen* that must have been number twelves at least; and his hat looked as if he had slept on it all night.

The occupants of the waggon were evidently coming to visit the Robertsons, and Reginald watched with some curiosity to see who they were.

Presently there alighted from the back of the waggon a short, round man, with bristling grey hair in a circle round his face, like a baboon. His complexion was burnt to a brick-red; his little twinkling eyes, of no particular colour, peeped over his puffy cheeks; his broad mouth turned up at the corners in a vacuous smile. He was clad in a suit of rather shiny black, and had a broad band of crape round his left arm.

When he was safely on the ground, he turned to assist the descent of a lady who followed him, and who was, in many respects, a remarkable figure. She was at least six feet high, and large in proportion, although far from stout. Her angles were very strongly indicated, and were brought out, rather than concealed, by her costume, which presented a good many straight lines, and suggested the idea that the material had been economized, which, in a person of such length, was excusable. Reginald could not see her face, for it was almost hidden by a large black "cappie," or sun-bonnet; her dress was also of unrelieved black, and was protected in front by a black alpaca apron. In her ungloved hands she carried a white pocket-handkerchief with a broad black border, which had picked up a good deal of dust on the road.

Both the gentleman and the lady looked decidedly frowzy and tumbled, as if they had been sleeping in their clothes all night, as no doubt they had, on the beds inside the waggon. They opened the gate, and came slowly walking towards the house, two very dingy objects in the fresh winter morning sunlight.

"They must have come from attending a funeral somewhere," thought Reginald, as he retreated from the window and began to dress.

There was a tap at the door, and Ben, one of the

younger boys, came in with a cup of coffee. This early coffee was a colonial institution which Reginald thoroughly appreciated.

“Who are your visitors, Ben?” he asked, smiling.

The boy laughed out. “Mr. and Mrs. Bergmann,” he said; “aren’t they old guys? They’ve spanned out, worse luck, and are going to stay here all the morning.”

He made a wry face as he went out, and Reginald felt rather inclined to imitate him. He had hoped to have his friends to himself on this last day. He dressed and went outside, and found Jan just starting for Bosman’s Kloef.

“You are coming back here to-night, Jan?” he asked.

“Yes; I must, for we must be off pretty early to-morrow,” replied Jan.

“We are coming up in a body, on horseback, to fetch you this afternoon,” said Mr. Robertson.

“All right. Good-bye so long, then,” said Jan, as he drove off.

The driver of the waggon, in his strangely-patched garments, came up to the stoep for a cup of coffee, which one of the boys brought him. Reginald had lived enough on the farm to be aware that all Dutchmen shake hands with you without waiting for the ceremony of introduction, and would be quite offended if you declined the civility; so he was prepared for

the huge unwashed paw which was thrust upon him, and which he accepted, nevertheless, with a feeling of disgust. Thinking he might as well get it all over at once, he then went into the dining-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Bergmann were also drinking coffee. To them he was duly introduced, and shook hands. Mrs. Bergmann had laid aside her "cappie," displaying her thin, untidy grey hair; and Reginald could now see her face, which was the largest and plainest, he thought, that he had ever looked upon. It wore, however, an expression of good nature, which saved it from being repulsive.

As soon as he could decently do so, he retired to wash his hands, privately wishing that the visitors had done the same before he had shaken hands with them. As he came out of his room again, he encountered May in the passage.

"Water is scarce," she said, looking at him and laughing, for she knew well enough what he had been doing.

"With some people, evidently," said Reginald, laughing too. "But tell me, Miss Robertson, have those people just come from a funeral?"

"A funeral!" replied May, her eyes dancing with fun. "What are you thinking of, Mr. Carson? They are just returning home after their honeymoon."

"Their *what?*" said Reginald.

"Their honeymoon. They were married about a fortnight ago."

"But why do they dress up in that style?"

"Because they are both in mourning. You see, he is a widower, and she is a widow. He lost his wife about three months ago, and she lost her husband about six months ago. He is still in mourning for his late wife, and she is still in mourning for her late husband."

Reginald was afraid they would hear him laughing, and he followed May out on to the stoep.

"But is this really true, Miss Robertson?" he asked. "Aren't you chaffing me?"

"Of course it's true," she replied. "Dutch people always marry again as quickly as they can; they think it quite an insult to the deceased partner if they don't."

"I wish I understood Dutch better," said Reginald. "I couldn't make out what the old fellow was talking about just now."

"I will tell you," said May. "He was telling us how he sent a photograph of his late wife down to Port Elizabeth, and had it enlarged into a picture, and beautifully framed in a gilt frame, the present wife listening meanwhile with an approving smile."

"Was his late wife anything like this one?" asked

Reginald. "Because this one wouldn't bear much enlarging."

"For shame, Mr. Carson! She is a most estimable woman," said May. "And one can't have too much of a good thing, you know."

She went off, brimming over with fun, and Reginald went inside again.

That day lived long in his memory as one of the happiest he had ever spent, in spite of the ache at his heart. That he crushed down for the present, and enjoyed himself without thought.

The Robertsons made much of him, for they were truly sorry to part with him; and Reginald, who had been accustomed to be made much of at home, but had never been spoilt by it, appreciated it. He responded to all their little kindnesses and attentions with affectionate gratitude; and his manner towards Mr. and Mrs. Robertson was almost that of a son. He readily promised to write to them, on condition that they did their share of the correspondence.

"I never forget my friends, Mrs. Robertson," he said; "and I shall write regularly if I promise to do so."

"So shall we, Mr. Carson," she replied; "one or other of us."

"And, in spite of all you say," added Mr. Robertson, "we shall look forward to seeing you again one day."

“It won’t be for want of inclination on my part if you don’t, Mr. Robertson,” replied Reginald, with a sigh.

The children were all at home for the June holidays, and Reginald romped with them to their heart’s content in the morning, while May and her mother were busy. The newly-married couple did not stay very long after breakfast, but, to the relief of every one, spanned in their oxen and departed. Reginald watched them climbing into the waggon, and thereby discovered that Mrs. Bergmann wore white cotton stockings, which, of course, he ought not to have observed; but, in fact, they shone through her black dress, which was of very thin material. He also observed, having rather quick eyes, that although the black-bordered handkerchief was ostentatiously held in her hand during the whole visit, all its useful purposes were served by the black alpaca apron, as occasion required. On one of these occasions his eye happened to catch May’s, and, although it was highly improper, a glance of mutual amusement and comprehension passed between them.

The worthy people were rather hard to entertain, not being brilliant in conversation or fertile in resource, and the joy of the family at their departure was only veiled by decent civility. When the creaking of the waggon, the crack of the whip, and the fiendish yells of

the driver died away in the distance, May said with a great sigh—

“Oh, mother, I can’t entertain those Dutch people. My head quite aches with trying to think of something to say to them.”

“They are not very interesting, certainly,” was all Mrs. Robertson observed, as she retired into the kitchen.

In the afternoon several of them rode over to Bosman’s Kloof together to fetch Jan.

Reginald rode beside May. There was no harm in it, and he was determined to enjoy these last few hours to the utmost. She was asking him questions about England, and he described his home to her—the grey old English manor house, the wide green park, the woods where the pheasants nested, the sunny terrace bordered with flowers, where his mother always walked in the winter mornings. She listened to it all with the greatest interest, and remarked at last, in a tone of envy—

“England must be a lovely country. I *should* like to see it.”

“It is a lovely country, and I hope you will see it some day, Miss Robertson,” said Reginald, quietly. He fell into a day-dream, lasting about five seconds, in which the old home belonged to him, and he brought

May to it as his wife. And thereupon they arrived at Bosman's Kloef, and saw the real owner of that place, and of Sedgwick Manor in England, standing on the stoep looking out for them.

Jan, ever hospitable, had coffee ready for the whole party, and very merry they were over it. Old Leentje grinned delightedly when she saw Reginald, for had he not brought her from Port Elizabeth a resplendent red and yellow silk handkerchief, which now adorned her woolly head? Nevertheless she was in bad spirits, because her baas was going away, and she had to seek service elsewhere; whereas she had hoped, on the contrary, that he was going to bring her a "missis" who would not be too strict with her.

Jan had arranged all his affairs, and was ready to return with them. He rode down on one of his own horses, which Mr. Robertson undertook to send back for him; and, as it was getting late, they started. It was one of the loveliest evenings that Reginald had seen in South Africa. The sun set about five, and the moon was rising at the same time. The sky was perfectly clear, and tinged with every shade of colour, from the crimson sunset to the pale amber of the moonrise. Overhead were transparent depths of purple, in which the stars came out, one by one, living points of fire. The wide, wild karoo lay stretched in silent

repose, the low lines of the hills standing out black and sharp against the pale, clear sky. The crickets' loud chirping filled the air, and was only interrupted by the harsh metallic note of frogs, heard in some far-away pool of water.

Reginald rode beside May again all the way home, but this time they were both very silent. He was thinking, over and over, that this was his last night in the karoo, perhaps the last he would ever have, and in less than a week he would be on the sea. What she was thinking he could not guess, and she did not tell him—then.

There followed a pleasant, sociable evening, like many that had gone before. They played some round games of cards until the children went to bed, and then they had music, and talked round the fire. Jan, rather to Reginald's surprise, developed a hidden talent for music, and sang in a powerful though untrained voice. Reginald himself was in boyish spirits, and the life of the whole party. It was all on the surface, but for the time being it was quite genuine.

At last, however, the last "Good nights" must be said—not too late, for the travellers had to make an early start, so as to catch the post-cart in Petrusville. Reginald passed a restless night, and woke with the first peepings of day. His heart was like lead now, but

outwardly he was cheerful, friendly, openly regretful, but in no danger of betraying himself. They drank coffee, almost in the dark; the whole family gathered round them for last words and farewells. Jan, of course, had no particular regrets; yet he was not more composed than Reginald was when he took May's hand in his, and looked in her eyes for the last time and said good-bye. May looked a little pale, he noticed; but, when all the rest were saying how much they would miss him, and how sorry they were that he must go, she said nothing.

Mr. Robertson was ready to drive them down, and Reginald was glad to make the last few minutes as short as possible. He gave one last look back, as they drove away, at the figures gathered on the stoep—one figure especially among the rest; then he closed that chapter of his life with a resolute hand, and turned his thoughts towards England and home.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE hot July sunshine lay on field and wood and river. The dark green foliage of the elm trees hung heavy and motionless in the still, hot air; in the pool underneath the cattle stood knee-deep in the water, their only escape from the perpetual torment of gnats and flies. Nothing stirred except those buzzing insects; all nature was drowsy and slumberous with heat.

There was a noble beech tree on the lawn at Sedgwick Manor, whose wide-stretching arms sheltered one end of the eastern terrace—the flower-bordered terrace where Mrs. Carson took her winter morning walks. On a sultry summer afternoon such as this, that end of the terrace was steeped in cool dark shade; moreover, it had the additional advantage of commanding a view of the entrance gate, and the first part of the drive leading up to the front of the house.

It was here, then, about four o'clock in the afternoon, that Mrs. Carson had taken up her station in order to obtain the first glimpse of the keenly-expected

travellers. Beside her stood the little tea-table, with cups all ready for welcome visitors, and on it lay the telegram which Reginald had sent from Southampton that morning. The carriage had gone to the station an hour ago, and she was momentarily expecting its return with a mixture of longing and dread that was almost overpowering.

On the whole, the longing to see her son, the joy of having him at her side again, prevailed; the dread of greeting her unknown nephew, the lord of the manor, fell into the background.

Mrs. Carson had been, and still was, a very pretty woman. She had the same grey eyes, the same delicate features and sensitive mouth as her son. Her hair was grey and her complexion faded, but the mingled sweetness and dignity of her expression would have made the plainest face attractive. Just now, as she sat leaning forward, her eyes lit up with eager expectation, her lips trembling a little, her cheeks flushed with a tinge of colour, she looked like a young woman.

A faint breeze stirred the broad leaves of the beech tree, and borne on its wings came a faint, distant sound like the rumbling of wheels. Mrs. Carson sat straight upright and listened. Yes, there was no doubt about it this time, the carriage was really coming; in another

minute it would appear round the elm trees at the curve of the road.

A cloud of white dust rose at the corner, in the midst of which the two old grey horses, that had journeyed to and from the station for many a long year, made their appearance, quickening their pace as they realized that they were nearly home. As soon as the carriage, with the two young gentlemen seated in it, passed through the entrance gate, Mrs. Carson rose from her seat and walked round to the front of the house to be ready to greet them. The front doors stood wide open, and the servants of the establishment (they were not very many) were gathered inside the hall to greet their new master.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Reginald sprang out, with no thought for any one but his mother.

"My dear mother!" he said, holding her in his arms for a minute. Then he remembered Jan, and turned round. Jan had alighted, and stood looking about him with a self-possessed and curious air. Everything was so very new to him. When Reginald spoke he came forward. "This is Jan, mother," said Reginald. "Jan, this is my mother."

Mrs. Carson greeted him with a sweet smile, and held out her hand.

"I am very pleased to see you, John," she said.

Jan bowed, and responded courteously. His big brown hand quite extinguished the delicate white one that was put into it.

He would no more have thought of offering to kiss his aunt than Reginald had thought of offering to kiss his when he visited her in Port Elizabeth.

They went into the hall, where the servants stood drawn up in line. There was a general bowing and curtsying, and a small chorus of, "Good afternoon, Sir John."

Jan looked at them for a moment as if he thought they were all cracked. Then his face suddenly lit up with comprehension, and he gave them all a pleasant "Good afternoon." It was the first time he had heard his title, for on board ship he had insisted on passing as Mr. Vermaak, and Reginald had given in to his whim.

The servants were greatly impressed. Their new master's magnificent figure and handsome face excited their admiration. They had greatly resented beforehand the arrival of this interloper, who was to take what they had always looked upon as their favourite Mr. Reginald's place; and although no word had been breathed of Jan's parentage, they had had a vague idea that a young man who had been born and brought up in Africa must be more or less black. Jan's fair hair

and blue eyes were quite a revelation to them; and those among them who remembered his father, could not fail to see the likeness. The first impression, therefore, was a good one.

A short time later, Mrs. Carson, with her son and her nephew, sat on the terrace under the beech tree. Mrs. Carson had been careful to order coffee to be made, as she had learned from Reginald that Jan always drank coffee. She was conversing pleasantly with Jan about the voyage and his first impressions of England, while Reginald leaned back in his chair, gazing his fill at the familiar garden, the well-loved trees and meadows, the dear old grey house, all sleeping in the summer sunshine, as they had done every summer since he could remember. In all his wanderings, he said to himself, he had seen nothing, after all, so fair as his home. He was roused from his happy reverie by Jan.

"What do you call this tree, Reginald?" he asked, looking up into the rich green canopy overhead.

"It is a beech," said Reginald. "Have you never seen one?"

"No," said Jan; "it is a magnificent tree. I suppose it would grow in the colony?"

"In the colony, but hardly in the karoo," said Reginald. "There is not water enough for a tree like this."

"It requires a rather sandy soil," observed Mrs. Carson.

"It would have plenty of sand, and not much else, on my place," said Jan, smiling.

"There are some fine copper beeches in the park," said Reginald. "I will show them to you to-morrow when you view your domain."

"My domain!" said Jan. "I cannot yet think of it as mine. It seems to me that it is yours, and I am your guest."

"You must accustom yourself to the thought that it is yours," said Mrs. Carson, gently. "It will soon come naturally to you."

Reginald, who had some idea what these words cost his mother, looked at her keenly, but read no expression on her face save her ordinary sweet placidity.

Jan was evidently touched by her words. "It is very kind of you, aunt," he said, "to give so ready a welcome to an usurper like myself."

"You must not call yourself that," she replied in the same tone, "because you are the rightful master."

"And you must make acquaintance with every corner of your estate as quickly as possible," put in Reginald. "Mother, are there any riding horses available?"

"Yes, I think so, dear. There is Peter, your old

favourite; and Richard says that Bessie, the little black mare, is a very nice horse to ride, but perhaps rather small for you. And then, Vigo is in splendid condition. He would suit John, I should think; for I am sure he must require a big horse."

She glanced at Jan's athletic figure with a smile in which there was some admiration.

Jan smiled too. "Well, it isn't much use to give me a Shetland pony," he said; "but so long as my feet are off the ground, I can manage."

This set Reginald recalling some of his experiences on the farm, and so they sat chatting pleasantly, and sometimes merrily, while the shadows lengthened, until the first bell rang, announcing seven o'clock.

Reginald went with Jan to his room to initiate him into the mysteries of dressing for dinner.

Jan had bought himself some clothes in Port Elizabeth, and was now attired like any other English gentleman in the country, though he much rebelled against waistcoats, which he had never been in the habit of wearing. This was the first time he had worn his dress suit, and he looked bigger than ever in it.

"I wonder if I shall ever get used to all this swelldom and ceremony!" he sighed, when the operation of dressing was completed.

"Of course you will," said Reginald. "It will become just a matter of course afterwards."

"I don't know," said Jan, dubiously, as he contemplated himself in the mirror. "However, I will do my best. Aren't you going to dress yourself?"

"Yes, I am," said Reginald, retreating; "but it doesn't take me long."

Jan observed the little ceremonies of dinner with grave curiosity. The daintily laid table, the silent deft waiting of the well-trained servants, the various courses, all arrested his attention. He had known little beyond the Kafir woman's cottage and the isolation of his own farm, having visited but few families in Port Elizabeth, so that many everyday things were almost as new to him as they would have been to a Kafir.

Reginald, sitting opposite to him, felt as if he were dreaming. Everything was so unaltered, from his mother's dear face to the furniture, which stood in exactly the same places that it had stood in for years, that he could almost have thought he had never been away. Yet opposite to him was this strange, handsome cousin of his, whose face had grown familiar to him in scenes so different, and seemed now to come between him and all his past life, and to make him look on the future with different eyes. And then it seemed to him

that, instead of having been away only ten months, he had been away ten years.

It seemed so to his mother too, sometimes, as she feasted her eyes on his face. For Reginald had suddenly grown much older since he went away. He was a boy when he left, he was a man when he returned; and Mrs. Carson, like most mothers, felt a pang of regret at the change—a passing pang only, for it was quickly forgotten in grateful joy at having him again, and in pride at seeing him so manly and reliable.

The evening was close and oppressive, and after dinner they returned to the terrace, and sat there until late, talking. Reginald had many questions to ask concerning the local events of the past year, the welfare of friends and neighbours, both rich and poor, and such-like matters; all more intimate topics were by common consent avoided. Reginald foresaw a good deal of constraint in their future intercourse if this state of things was to continue. His mother, he knew, must be extremely anxious to learn particulars of her brother's life and death; yet he doubted if she would ever venture to ask for them; and it would be difficult, to say the least, to live with Jan day by day without ever alluding to his parents or family, or any of his past life. Friends and neighbours, too, would no doubt ask many

questions, perfectly harmless in themselves, but impossible to answer—truthfully, at least.

After they had parted for the night, Mrs. Carson came to her son's room, as she had done every night of his life as long as he was with her. Now they were at last alone, and could speak freely of all that was in their hearts. They sat down, like two lovers, in a big armchair by the open window, and talked freely, fully, confidentially, far into the night. It was an untold relief to both of them.

"Mother," said Reginald, "I never knew till now how brave and good you are. Jan can have missed nothing in his welcome."

"I would not for worlds that he should miss anything," she replied earnestly. "I was the more careful about every little detail of his reception, because, after all, his misfortune is *not* his fault."

"No, it is not," said Reginald. "But, mother, it must have been a terrible shock to you when you received my letter."

"Yes, it was," she replied sadly. "All my conjectures about my poor brother's fate had never come anywhere near the truth. But it is not right to blame the dead, and it would be most unjust to blame this innocent boy. Besides, from what you tell me, he feels his position bitterly, too."

"He feels it far more bitterly than we do," said Reginald. "And I cannot help being very sorry for him, for really he has many good qualities."

"I am sure of it," said his mother. "Indeed, I like what I have seen of him very much. His appearance is undoubtedly prepossessing; and his manner, if somewhat abrupt, is never ungentlemanly. And besides that," she added smiling, "I could forgive him a great deal for his evident attachment to you."

"Yes, he is fond of me," Reginald acknowledged; "and I like him too, although there is much that I do not like, I must say frankly."

"Well," said his mother, "we must remember that on one side he comes from a savage race—for I suppose it can be called nothing else—and we must make allowance for him accordingly. If only all had been right!" she concluded, with a sigh.

"If only!" Reginald echoed the sigh. "If only my uncle had married the lowest of Dutchwomen, or of low-class Englishwomen, it would have been less disastrous than this."

"I shall never be able to understand it," said Mrs. Carson. "If I had learned it from any one but yourself, I should not have believed it."

"Mother," said Reginald, "what do you mean to say to the outside world?"

“I have thought of that,” she replied quietly. “To mere acquaintances there is no need to say anything, that I can see. To my intimate friends I intend to say simply that my dear brother married beneath him. They will understand then that the subject is an unpleasant one, and will leave it alone.”

“After all,” said Reginald, “we may be very thankful that Jan does not show his coloured blood in any noticeable way. If he were as black as his brothers, we should be in a much worse fix.”

“He may have a black son some day, though,” said his mother. “However, the question of his marriage would raise fresh difficulties, which, I suppose, we should have to leave to his own conscience.”

“We will not worry about that contingency until it occurs,” said Reginald, who had not much faith in Jan’s conscience. “I hardly think that Jan will ever make up his mind to live in England; and if he had a black son, I think he would have the grace to keep him in Africa.”

“But he might want to marry an English girl,” said his mother. “I suppose it is he who was engaged to Miss Lisle?”

“I suppose so,” said Reginald. “I dare not ask him, but I should think there can hardly be a doubt

of it. It will be much best to prevent them from meeting, if possible."

"Miss Lisle is in Germany at present," said Mrs. Carson. "Mrs. Everett took her mother to Wiesbaden as soon as she could be moved, and Gertrude went with them."

"So she is safely out of the way for the present," said Reginald, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Yes. I am sorry about the affair, all the same," said his mother, regretfully, "for I should like you to have known Miss Lisle. She is a charming girl."

Reginald knew, of course, that his mother would like him to marry a charming girl some day, and she had evidently taken a great fancy to Miss Lisle; but the subject was an unpleasant one to him for several reasons, and he dropped it.

After his mother left him, he felt no inclination to sleep, but still sat in the armchair, lost in thought.

He had never until now kept anything of importance from his mother, and he felt it keenly now that he was obliged to do so. Of two things that deeply affected his life he had not spoken to her, and never intended to speak to her. One was his hopeless affection, as he deemed it, for May Robertson; the other was his suspicion, which almost amounted to certainty, that Jan was guilty of bloodshed.

It was not that his conscience reproached him for his reticence in either case, for he knew that it was right; he only regretted the necessity for it. As regarded his decision never to seek for further proofs of his cousin's guilt, he had made that decision because he thought it was the best he could make, and his reason refused to regret it. What his mother's view of the question might have been he could not tell, and would never be able to know.

As his mind reverted to the conversation that had just passed, he recalled his mother's remark, that she could forgive Jan a good deal for the sake of his attachment to himself. It was true, as Reginald could not help observing, that since the day when Jan, after his outburst of passion, had suddenly consented to go to England, he had manifested an extraordinary, almost dog-like, affection for his cousin. He followed him everywhere, and seemed never satisfied to be long out of his company; he yielded to his slightest wish, and consulted him about everything; he openly showed his admiration and affection for him, in striking contrast to his usual reserved demeanour.

Reginald could not understand the meaning of this sudden change. He accepted his cousin's advances with some reserve, doubting lest they concealed an ulterior design, which might eventually land him in

fresh difficulties and perplexities. But if, indeed, he had really obtained this extraordinary ascendancy over his cousin, then it behoved him to be careful how he used it. He pondered over this for some time.

The first cool breath of early morning stirred the trees, and awakened the first of the birds. Another day of life, of duty, and of care was already brightening the eastern horizon. The slow, stealthy twilight crept up the dark vault of heaven, and put the stars out one by one. Reginald started from his reverie, and looked at his watch; it had stopped at half-past three.

He felt no inclination for sleep now, so he took his cold bath instead, dressed himself, and went into the garden.

CHAPTER XV.

THEY were still seated at the breakfast-table on the following morning, when Mr. Bennett was announced.

Mr. Bennett had been steward and agent to old Sir Richard Fairbank for many years, and had taken charge of everything during Reginald's absence. He was a tall, fine-looking man, with a pleasant, honest face, brown hair mingled with grey, and a hearty, cordial-sounding voice. He greeted Reginald with very evident pleasure at seeing him again, and his new master with a thoroughly respectful, but by no means servile manner.

Jan was favourably impressed by him, and showed a disposition to be friendly.

"I am glad you have come early, Mr. Bennett," he said. "My cousin and I are going for a ride over the estate, and I hope you will accompany us."

"I shall be very glad, Sir John," said Mr. Bennett. "I have brought my accounts and other papers with me, but I suppose you would rather leave those till another time?"

“Yes, I think so,” said Jan. “We can attend to those in the afternoon.”

He was in good spirits this morning, and quite ready for work. They went to the stables together to inspect the horses.

“This is Vigo, that my mother thought might be big enough for you, John,” said Reginald; he was teaching himself to call his cousin John, as it sounded better, and his mother always did so.

Vigo was a very tall, roan horse, and Jan admired him. He asked if he was quiet, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, forthwith vaulted on to him and rode bare-backed round the yard, while Reginald, Mr. Bennett and the two grooms looked on, amused and admiring.

“It is evident that Sir John is a first-rate horseman,” Mr. Bennett observed to Reginald.

“Yes, he is. I believe his father was the same,” replied Reginald.

“You are right,” said Mr. Bennett. “Mr. John Fairbank was a most daring rider, and followed the hounds when he was a boy of only nine or ten years old.”

“You must have been very young yourself then,” remarked Reginald, smiling.

“He and I were exactly of an age,” said Mr. Bennett;

“and we were great friends as boys, before he went to college.”

He sighed a little, and Reginald said, “You must be a friend to his son now for his sake.”

“I am very willing to be a friend to him for his own sake, if he will let me,” replied the steward; and just then Jan rode up to them, and dismounted.

“Is Vigo your horse, Reginald?” he asked; “because I will have him from you, by fair means or foul.”

“You are very welcome,” said Reginald. “But he is not mine in particular. Grandfather used to ride him.”

“He is a capital brute,” said Jan. “Where did you get him?”

“He was reared on the place,” replied Reginald. “We have his mother too, but she does no more work. I dare say we shall see her roaming about the park somewhere. Now, shall we go?”

Mr. Bennett had ridden over, so was already provided with a mount; and a few minutes later they all set out together. Mrs. Carson was watching them from the dining-room window, and the tears came into her eyes. Jan, on horseback, and at a little distance, was the living image of his father, and the sight brought back some very old days to her memory. Mrs. Carson had been passionately fond of her brother;

his evil ways, his exile, and his disappearance had been a greater grief to her than her own early widowhood. She would have given years of life to have seen him once more.

"I think we ought to go first to the dairy farm," said Reginald, "if you don't mind, John."

"My dear fellow, take me wherever you like," said Jan. "I want to see everything, but I don't at all mind in what order I see it."

"There is an old woman living at the dairy farm," said Reginald, "the mother of the man who has it now. She was my nurse, and also my mother's. We never had any other. I feel that my first visit is due to her."

"By all means," said Jan; "and we can inspect the dairy farm at the same time."

"Old Nancy nursed your father too, Sir John," said Mr. Bennett. "She is seventy years old now."

"I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance," said Jan.

He was interested in everything he saw, and stopped so often to look at different things, and ask questions, that their progress was rather slow.

"I don't wonder you found our roads rough in the karoo, Reginald," he observed humorously, as they paused after a canter along the hard, white high-road.

“Our roads are bad in winter, though, sometimes,” said Mr. Bennett; “and the lanes are often impassable.”

They dismounted at the gate of the dairy farm, and walked up the flagged garden walk, with bushes of wallflower on either side perfuming the air, to the wide-open door, which revealed a large, oak-raftered kitchen, clean and cool.

A stout, tidy woman came to the door, whose broad face beamed like the sun when she saw Reginald.

“Mother, mother, here is Mr. Reginald!” she called out; and an old woman who was sitting by the table rose and came forward, walking upright and vigorously.

Reginald greeted Mrs. Duckett, the younger woman, with a hearty handshake, and introduced her to his cousin; then he went forward to the old woman.

“Well, nurse,” he said affectionately, “here I am, you see, safe and sound.”

He bent down and kissed her, and she held both his hands, gazing at him with eyes that were yet bright and clear, for all her seventy years.

“God bless you, Master Reginald!” she said. “Your own mother isn’t more glad to see you than I am this day.”

Jan, who had watched this little scene with some curiosity, now came forward with a pleasant smile.

“I must have a share in this welcome too,” he

said. "Is this my father's nurse that you spoke of, Reginald?"

The old woman curtseyed low, and gazed earnestly into Jan's face.

"Yes," she said, after a pause. "Yes, Sir John is like his father, too; but not so like to him as Master Reginald is."

"Ah, Master Reginald is your last baby," said Jan, smiling. "I shall have to take a back seat, I see, when he is about."

Whether consciously or not, Jan had found the way to these people's hearts. Nothing was so certain to win him a high place in their favour as the manifestation of his own affection for Reginald, and a pleasant, playful humour in ordinary conversation. Mr. Bennett recognized the manner as his father's over again; poor Jack Fairbank, as he always called him, had been immensely popular with his father's tenants, in spite of all his shortcomings.

Reginald, watching the little scene—the white-haired, vigorous old woman, looking up so earnestly at the tall, powerful, handsome young fellow, who looked down at her with a kindly smile, and held her withered hand in his strong clasp—wondered, as he had wondered many a time, whether this man could really be a revengeful, brutal murderer. And then he suddenly

recalled the face as it had looked at him that day when Jan cursed his father's memory: would he ever see it look like that again? he wondered; he hoped never.

Mr. Duckett, the farmer, now came in, as happy and beaming as every one else seemed to be. Jan was much struck by the familiar affection which Reginald had inspired in all his tenants. Wherever they went it was the same.

"Really, Reginald," he said laughing, "I shall never take your place with these people. I shall have to retreat ignominiously to Bosman's Kloof, I can see."

"They will be just the same to you when they know you," said Reginald. "They like you already, it is plain."

They duly inspected the dairy farm, and Jan was much impressed with the spick-and-span condition of the whole place.

"Ah! you have everything you want here," he said, "in the way of buildings and utensils. You don't have to shift and contrive like us poor Cape farmers."

"No, there is a great deal in that," said Reginald. "We don't deserve half so much credit for what we accomplish, because it is done with half the labour and difficulty."

“I suppose those who have gone before us must get the credit,” said Mr. Bennett; “we have entered into their labours.”

“We can say the same,” observed Jan, “for we have much easier times in the colony now than our forefathers, the first settlers, who did all the pioneering.”

Reginald could not help reflecting that Jan’s forefathers had not done much pioneering, the one set of them having been English landowners, and the other Kafir chiefs; but of course he made no remark to this effect. Mr. Bennett was under the impression that Jan’s mother was a Dutchwoman, and that he referred to his Dutch ancestors.

On leaving the farm, they rode across the park. The wide expanse of turf and the noble trees excited Jan’s admiration.

“I have never seen anything like this,” he said. “How beautifully green!”

“It looks dry and dusty now,” said Mr. Bennett. “If you had seen it in the early summer, after a good shower of rain, you might well have called it green. It was really lovely.”

“It does not look dry to me now,” said Jan. “You do not know the meaning of the word ‘dry’ here, Mr. Bennett. What would you say to a two years’ drought?”

"I don't suppose I should be in a condition to say anything at the end of it," laughed Mr. Bennett.

"A grass country like this would never live through it," said Reginald. "Mr. Bennett has never seen anything remotely resembling a South African karoo."

At the further side of the park was a plantation of pines and larches which extended for some distance along the park fence. Crossing the end of this, the horsemen emerged into a lane bordered with high tangled hedges. As they rode along the lane skirting the plantation, they came suddenly upon a gate on the right hand, through which were visible a weedy and neglected-looking garden, and a pretty creeper-covered house, standing back from the lane.

Reginald pulled up his horse, and the others did the same.

"This house is still empty?" he said.

"Yes; but I had an offer for it the other day," said Mr. Bennett. "That is one of the matters I have to speak to you about, Sir John."

"Is this house mine, too?" asked Jan.

"Yes, it is part of the property," said Reginald. "A retired naval officer lived here for years, but he died last year, and the house has been empty since."

"It wants a good deal of repair," said Mr. Bennett.

"I should like to see it," said Jan.

They dismounted accordingly, and tied up their horses; then they passed through the deserted garden to the house.

"It must be a pretty place when it is well kept," observed Jan.

"It is," said Reginald. "It always looked nice in old Captain Mason's time, for he was passionately fond of gardening, and had everything about him as neat as a new pin, as sailors always do. It makes me sad to see it so neglected."

"I have brought the keys," said Mr. Bennett. "It struck me that Sir John might wish to come and see the house."

"You think of everything, Mr. Bennett," said Jan, courteously, as they passed through the door into the dark, cool passage.

The house was as pretty inside as out; it only wanted human life to brighten it. An empty house is always sad. There were drawing-room and dining-room, with bow-windows opening on to the lawn, and a library and morning-room at the back. Upstairs were several good-sized bedrooms, and the kitchen and offices were bright and cheerful.

"It is a very nice house," said Jan. "You say it needs repair, Mr. Bennett?"

"Yes, Sir John; the roof is very bad in some places,

and all the piping needs looking to. Then, of course, it must be painted and papered throughout."

"How do you get on to the roof?" asked Jan.

Mr. Bennett pointed out a ladder and a trap-door, and, rather to his surprise, the next minute Sir John was out on the roof himself, examining the whole of it thoroughly, and showing by his remarks that he quite understood how the repairs should be carried out. Mr. Bennett followed him with some difficulty.

"I am getting rather old and stiff for this sort of gymnastics," he said laughingly to Reginald; but he was much impressed with Jan's practical knowledge.

"A colonial farmer generally builds his own house, you see," said Reginald. "He has to be architect, mason, carpenter, plumber, painter, and glazier, all in one."

"Well, it is a good practical education," said Mr. Bennett, quietly.

When they had descended to the ground floor again, Jan said—

"How long would it take to put this place in order for a tenant, Mr. Bennett?"

"Oh, it could be done in a month or six weeks, if you wished it, Sir John," he replied; "it is only a case of putting enough men on to it."

"You said that some one wished to take it."

“Yes. A gentleman was here three weeks ago to see the house and was very much pleased with it. He was willing to give £80 per annum for it, which is what Captain Mason always paid. When he heard that you were shortly coming home, he said he would wait until you came, and asked me to let him know.”

“Who is he?” asked Jan.

“A Mr. Sinclair, from London.”

Jan turned round sharply. “What Sinclair is that?” he asked.

Reginald tried to remember how he associated the name of Sinclair with his cousin, but could not for the moment. The conversation that followed presently reminded him.

“He is a partner in the firm of Sinclair and Allen, in Broad Street,” said Mr. Bennett.

“I think I know them,” said Jan, quietly; “they have a branch in Capetown, and another in Port Elizabeth.”

“I believe so,” replied Mr. Bennett; “Mr. Sinclair was out at the Cape not long ago. He was much interested when he heard that you were coming from there.”

Of course, the Sinclairs were Miss Lisle’s friends, with whom she stayed in Port Elizabeth. Reginald began to foresee complications, should Jan meet with them again.

"Do you know if this is Mr. Edward Sinclair?" asked Jan.

"I do not know his name," replied Mr. Bennett; "but he is a tall, thin man, about forty, I should think, with a cast in his left eye."

"That is the man," said Jan. "Why does he want to come and live here?"

"It seems that Moxton, our market town, is Mrs. Sinclair's native place. She is in delicate health, and the west country climate suits her, so she wants to settle here before the winter."

"Have they children?"

"No, I believe not; but they entertain a good deal, so they want a good-sized house."

"We will talk it over afterwards," said Jan.

They remounted their horses and rode on. Reginald felt rather uneasy at this awkward coincidence, but he consoled himself by thinking that Jan would contrive in some way to avoid letting his house to Mr. Sinclair. Of course, he would not wish to do so.

Their rounds occupied them the whole morning, and they only returned in time for luncheon at two o'clock. Jan asked Reginald if he could invite Mr. Bennett to stay, as they were going to transact business in the afternoon.

“My dear fellow, you can invite whom you like to your own table, surely,” said Reginald, laughing.

“Well, but I did not know if your mother would like it,” said Jan. “You see, I am accustomed to be more free-and-easy in that way than you are.”

“Oh, we are not ceremonious here,” said Reginald; “and Bennett often has a meal with us.”

He was pleased, nevertheless, with Jan’s thoughtfulness, and that he was in no hurry to assume airs of mastership. Jan’s spirits did not seem at all dashed by the reappearance of Mr. Sinclair on the scene of his life; he talked more than usual during luncheon, addressing his conversation chiefly to his aunt, and praising up the estate, and everything he had seen, to her heart’s content.

After luncheon they adjourned to the library. Reginald was not coming, but Jan begged him to do so.

“You can help me a lot,” he said. “You know, I shall be a duffer at this kind of thing.”

He did not prove himself to be a duffer, however; on the contrary, he showed a quickness of intelligence which surprised Reginald, who had not supposed him to be much of a business man. He grasped the dry details which Mr. Bennett expounded to him with a readiness which gratified that worthy man, who had

been secretly dreading this part of his duty. He remembered Jan's father as a reckless and irresponsible youth, and had feared that the son might be the same.

Jan was not only willing to master all the business connected with his property, he was also amenable to advice, and anxious for it. He asked Mr. Bennett many questions which showed that he fully felt his responsibility, and constantly referred both to him and Reginald for their opinion, even in trifling matters.

"You see, you two know all about it, and I know nothing," he said good-humouredly.

"You will soon know as much as we do, at this rate, Sir John," said Mr. Bennett, well pleased.

They came at last to consider the question of Framleigh, which was the name of the empty house they had seen that morning. Reginald was curious to hear what Jan would say about it, and was amazed when his cousin said quietly—

"I should like Mr. Sinclair to have it. I know something of him, and I believe he would be a good tenant. Will you write to him for me, Mr. Bennett?"

"Yes, I will, Sir John, without delay. Are you satisfied about the rent?"

"Oh yes," said Jan, carelessly; "I suppose that is all right. You know best about that; and I should be

glad if you will settle all the business part of it with him, on such terms as he will agree to."

"Yes; and I suppose you would like the workmen put into the house as soon as possible?"

"Yes, please. And now, haven't we done enough of this sort of thing for one day?" said Jan, smiling and pushing away the papers in front of him.

"I should think so," said Reginald. "You have put your shoulder to the wheel to-day, and no mistake."

"A good beginning is half the whole," said Mr. Bennett, gathering together his papers; "and we have done all that is necessary for the present."

Mrs. Carson sent word to say that she was waiting tea for them on the terrace; and they went out, Jan asking Mr. Bennett to join them.

"You have done quite a hard day's work, John," said Mrs. Carson to her nephew. "You must not try to do everything at once, you know."

"Oh, Mr. Bennett will put on the curb when it is necessary, I have no doubt," said Jan, laughing. After a while he added, "I suppose I had better go to Moxton to-morrow, and call upon Messrs. ——. What is the name, Reginald?"

"Garrould," said Reginald. "The solicitors, you mean?"

“Yes. I don’t know if they are even quite happy about my identity yet.”

“Oh, I think that is all right,” said Mr. Bennett, smiling. “They had all the necessary papers; but they will be anxious to see you, no doubt.”

“Of course,” said Jan, dryly.

Mr. Bennett took his leave presently. He went home to his wife, and told her that the new master had turned up trumps.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE magnates of the neighbourhood came to call upon Jan. Reginald could not help being half amused and half annoyed at their scarcely concealed curiosity and their artfully turned questions. Jan himself did not seem to notice this. He did not, apparently, care about making new acquaintances, and was alike indifferent to all. His abrupt and reserved manner, however, did not create an unfavourable impression; it seemed to be in character with the halo of romance and mystery that surrounded his sudden appearance upon the scene.

“Reginald,” he said suddenly to his cousin one day, after some of the visitors had left, “you said to me once that neither you nor your mother would ever say a word about my parentage. I suppose you keep to that promise?”

“Of course,” said Reginald, rather surprised. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, it is all right. I only wanted to be sure that

I had a free hand, that's all." And Jan walked away, leaving Reginald somewhat mystified as to his meaning.

He understood it, however, shortly afterwards, when he overheard Jan calmly informing Mr. Bennett, with whom he had become very friendly, that the Vermaaks were a very good old Dutch family, to which his mother belonged; but that she had been dead some years.

The readiness with which Jan could lie had always amazed Reginald. And now he found himself an involuntary partner in his lie, for he could not well go and tell a different tale; besides, he had given his word. He consulted his mother on this point, and they decided that the only thing to be done was to let Jan go his own way.

"Do you know, mother," Reginald continued, "that John has let Framleigh to a Mr. Sinclair—the very same whom Miss Lisle stayed with at the Cape?"

Mrs. Carson was greatly dismayed. "But does John know it is the same?" she asked.

"Yes; he found it out when Mr. Bennett first spoke about it, and he did not seem to mind at all. In fact, he seemed quite anxious that Mr. Sinclair should have the house. I suppose he means to try and throw dust in his eyes with this tale about the Vermaaks. Perhaps

he does not know that Mr. Sinclair actually saw his mother."

"I think Miss Lisle told him that in her letter," said Mrs. Carson. "But you did not let out to him that you knew anything about the Sinclairs?"

"No, of course I did not," replied Reginald. "But, mother, how I hate this perpetual mystery and concealment! It makes me feel so mean—so contemptible." He sighed impatiently.

"It *is* humiliating," Mrs. Carson agreed; "but I do not see that it is our fault, or that we can help ourselves. It would not be kind or right to proclaim John's misfortune to the whole world."

"I suppose not," said Reginald. "Yet I feel sometimes as if I would rather have done that from the first than have to be always looking where I tread, lest I should make a false step."

"Well, I am very sorry the Sinclairs are likely to come and live here," said Mrs. Carson; "for I think that will put us into a very awkward position. I suppose we shall have to ask them to be silent about what they know."

"Which, with perfect strangers, will be more humiliating than ever," said Reginald. "Suppose they should have Miss Lisle to stay with them?"

"They will hardly do that when they recognize

John, I should think," replied Mrs. Carson. "At all events, we will not meet evils half way. I am thankful that John is already liked by his tenants. He does not seem to care about making advances to his neighbours."

"I think he is shy," said Reginald, "and he feels out of it in our highly conventional society, which is not surprising, considering the way he has always lived. I think it will be best to leave him alone, and not worry him too much about his social duties."

However, Jan came to him soon afterwards, and begged him to tell him what was expected of him in this matter.

"Because I know nothing at all about it," he said, "and I shall give offence all round."

"Well, you must return their visits," said Reginald; "and then it would be best to send out invitations to a dinner or a garden-party. Mother will be the best person to advise you about that sort of thing."

"Anything you like," said Jan; "only, do come and pay the visits with me, there's a good fellow."

"Of course," said Reginald. "Mother will come too."

These visits were an ordeal to all three of them; for Jan was more ill at ease in other people's houses than in his own. In his own, indeed, he did not act

like the master—seldom gave an order to the servants, and left all arrangements to Mrs. Carson. He had, from the first, agreed with his aunt that she and Reginald were to stay with him for six months, by which time some permanent arrangement could be made.

At Mrs. Carson's suggestion, Jan undertook to give a large garden-party, to which the whole neighbourhood was to be invited.

"You see," she said to him, "you can ask so many more people to a garden-party than to a dinner—practically, every one that you know."

"And a good many that I don't know," said Jan, laughing. "You will have to coach me, Aunt Alicia; I can never remember all these people, and shall certainly put the wrong names to them."

The invitations were sent out, and great preparations were made forthwith. Tennis courts and croquet lawns were put in order, a band was hired, tents were set up, and the Moxton confectioner received an order that filled his heart with joy, and promised to fill his pockets with something better. Reginald took a great deal of trouble to ensure that everything should go off well, and that Jan's first appearance in public, so to speak, should be an effective one.

Meanwhile, Jan himself was taking an extraordinary

interest in the progress of the repairs at Framleigh. He went to the house almost every day, inspected every part of the work, made various suggestions, which were generally excellent, and would not allow the smallest detail to be scamped. Reginald was more and more puzzled.

“One would think you were going to live there yourself,” he said one day. “You will make quite a little palace of it before you have done.”

“If I were going to live in it myself,” said Jan, “I should not take half so much trouble with it. I don’t care what sort of a shanty I live in.”

He had the grounds put in good order at the same time, sparing no expense, so that Mr. Bennett declared he ought to raise the rent.

“No, I don’t mean to do that,” was all Jan said in reply to that remark.

Three days before the garden-party was to take place, Jan came to Reginald, and said abruptly—

“The Sinclairs are staying at the hotel in Moxton until their house is ready for them to move into. I should like to go and call on them, if I can do so without breaking the rules of correct behaviour.”

“Of course you can, if you wish,” said Reginald.

“Will you come with me?”

“Yes, if you like.”

“I should like to invite them to the garden-party, too.”

“By all means. You had better take one of the printed invitations. An invitation by word of mouth is not sufficiently formal.”

“Right you are,” said Jan.

Reginald, as may be supposed, did not look forward to this visit, and he would not subject his mother to the ordeal. He took her card for Mrs. Sinclair, and he and Jan drove over to Moxton together. To his relief, and Jan’s apparent disappointment, the Sinclairs were out for the afternoon. It was only a respite, however, for, in reply to the cards and the invitation which Jan left, there came, on the following day, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair’s cards, and a polite acceptance of the invitation. Reginald wished them at Jericho, but Jan seemed perfectly satisfied.

The day of the garden-party arrived, and everything was propitious. The weather was gloriously fine, without being oppressively hot. All the arrangements had been thoroughly well carried out; nothing was lacking; there was no hitch anywhere.

Jan was in the best of spirits, and looked his best also. He was dressed in a well-fitting light-grey suit, which showed his splendid figure to great advantage; he seemed to have laid aside his usual stiffness and

reserve, and to be quite at his ease. Reginald, on the other hand, though his outward manner was always the same, was inwardly ill at ease.

The three made a handsome picture as they stood together on the terrace, ready to receive their guests—Mrs. Carson, with her delicate, faded beauty and gentle dignity, clad in soft grey silk and rare old white lace, standing between the two handsome youths, her son and her nephew, who towered above her, one on either side. Jan was really the most striking figure of the three; yet it was Reginald who looked every inch an English aristocrat; Jan was more like some splendid untameable lion out of the wilderness.

So, at least, thought Mr. Bennett, who arrived first, with his wife and daughter, being a sort of master of the ceremonies for the occasion. It was not long, however, before vehicles of all kinds, from the lordly barouche to the humble pony-chaise, came streaming up the drive, and the guests poured in thick and fast.

Mrs. Carson knew every one, and refreshed Jan's memory, or enlightened his ignorance, with such consummate tact, that he was able to receive all his guests without any embarrassment. Reginald, who was an excellent host, being self-forgetful, and pleased to give pleasure, also came frequently to his aid.

For half an hour or so all went well, and Reginald

even began to entertain faint hopes that something might prevent the Sinclairs from coming, when he suddenly caught sight of a fly, which he knew to belong to the Moxton hotel, coming up the drive, and his heart sank. A few minutes later, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair were announced.

Jan and Reginald, and a good many of the guests, were in the small drawing-room, where tea and coffee were being served. The French windows stood wide open to the terrace, where were Mrs. Carson and several others.

Reginald looked at the new-comers, as they entered, with some curiosity. Mr. Sinclair answered exactly to Mr. Bennett's description of him—tall, thin, and altogether colourless, with a noticeable cast in his left eye, but with, nevertheless, a shrewd and intelligent countenance. Mrs. Sinclair was very small and neat, a decidedly pretty brunette, with a self-possessed air, and exquisitely dressed. Her self-possession, however, was about to be put to a severe test.

“How do you do, Mrs. Sinclair?” said Jan, stepping forward and holding out his hand with an affable smile. “I am pleased to meet you again.”

Mrs. Sinclair was so completely taken by surprise, that even the lifelong habit of conventional politeness failed her; she simply stood still and stared. Her

husband was no less thunderstruck, but his amazement found words.

“You here, Mr. Vermaak!” he exclaimed aloud.

“Sir John Fairbank, at your service,” said Jan, with the same quiet smile, but with a curious look in his blue eyes which Reginald had not seen there before, and could hardly interpret.

In a moment Mrs. Sinclair had recovered herself. “Pray forgive my rudeness, Sir John,” she said, with a bewitching smile. “My pleasure at meeting you under such different circumstances is no less than my surprise, believe me. Allow me to offer you my sincere congratulations.”

Mr. Sinclair expressed himself, somewhat lamely, after the same sort; but Reginald heard him say to himself, under his breath, “Well, I *am* bothered!”

The other guests standing round were interested spectators of this little scene, which they only partly comprehended; but when Mrs. Sinclair alluded to having met Sir John under different circumstances, various knowing looks were exchanged. Reginald, to put an end to what, to him at least, was an unpleasant situation, came up to his cousin and asked to be introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair. Jan did so at once, and Reginald then offered to introduce them to his mother. He could see that Mrs. Sinclair, though she

had outwardly recovered her self-possession, was distinctly relieved when they went out on to the terrace. She was duly introduced to Mrs. Carson, and they entered into conversation, while he returned to the room to fetch her some tea. When he brought it to her, she was saying to Mrs. Carson in a somewhat effusive manner—

“What a delightful surprise I have just had in meeting your nephew here—so *quite* unexpectedly! You know, we met him in Port Elizabeth as Mr. Vermaak. Mr. Sinclair had some business dealings with him. Of course we had no idea then, nor had he, I suppose, of his real rank and position. What an interesting and romantic story it seems to be! *Do* tell me how you found him?”

“My son found him by a rather remarkable chain of events,” said Mrs. Carson, rather coldly. “He was travelling in South Africa with the object of searching out his uncle—my brother—who went out there many years ago, and had ceased to correspond with us. Reginald discovered that his uncle had been dead for some years, and that this was his son.”

“Indeed! How very interesting!” said Mrs. Sinclair again. “How charmed you must have been!”

“It was a great satisfaction to me,” replied Mrs. Carson, “although a sad one, to know for a certainty

my dear brother's fate, and the reason of his long silence." She did not say what the reason was, however, but left Mrs. Sinclair to infer what she liked, and continued, to change the subject, "Do you play tennis or croquet, Mrs. Sinclair?"

"I fear I am too old for tennis," smiled the lady, who well knew that in figure and appearance she was ten years younger than her real age. "I leave that to the young people. But I should enjoy a game of croquet."

"We will make up a set, then," said Mrs. Carson, rising, and leading the way to the croquet lawn.

Later in the afternoon, when the guests had dispersed themselves over the grounds, and were all enjoying themselves in different ways, Reginald saw Jan and Mr. Sinclair strolling along a side alley, deeply engaged in conversation. He wondered what sort of a tale Jan was pouring into his companion's ear, and by what arguments he would constrain him to believe it; he wondered, most of all, what was to be the end of all this.

The garden-party was a great success; that was unanimously acknowledged on all hands. It is true that Sir John absolutely declined to make a speech to his assembled guests, which Mr. Bennett wished him to do; but as no one expected it, no one missed it, and

every one was well pleased with their reception and entertainment. Of course this was owing in great measure to the exertions of Mrs. Carson, Reginald, and Mr. Bennett, and Jan was the first to own this when it was all over.

"There they go!" he said, in a tone of relief, when the last carriage drove away. "Well, I never could work a thing of this sort by myself. I am afraid sociability is not in my line. I am deeply obliged to you all for doing it for me."

"I am sure you have done your share," said Reginald.

"And it will come quite naturally to you before long," added Mrs. Carson; "when you get more used to English life and English ways. They are new to you now, but that will not last long."

"You will be quite a popular character, Sir John," said Mr. Bennett.

Jan shrugged his shoulders. "That is not my ambition," he said; "but if popularity is so easily bought, I may yet attain to it."

After this Reginald and his mother were asked no more awkward questions. A general impression was spread about in the neighbourhood that poor Jack Fairbank had made a *mésalliance* of some sort, and although there was plenty of gossip and conjecture,

good taste forbade any direct inquiries. The real truth was not suspected, owing to the simple fact that Jan was fair-haired and white-skinned ; and rumour, being ill supplied with information, grew weary at last, and allowed the whole matter to rest.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELEANOR SINCLAIR was a thorough woman of the world. She had practised social diplomacy ever since she was seven years old, and had attained to the proficiency she deserved. Of all the admirable qualities she had by this means acquired, the one on which she most prided herself was that perfect self-command which was never overthrown or disturbed by the most startling or untoward incidents of social existence. Nothing, therefore, could have been more annoying, more humiliating, to her, than to have this self-command so completely upset, even for a moment, as it had been that afternoon when she suddenly found herself face to face with Jan Vermaak. She had revenged herself almost instantly by her allusion to the different circumstances under which she had formerly met him, and by the effusive congratulations she had offered to Mrs. Carson. Nevertheless, her wounded vanity was by no means soothed.

As she reviewed the situation in her own mind, she

saw that it bristled with difficulties. They had treated Jan Vermaak with scant ceremony; but it would not do to offend Sir John Fairbank, who was one of the chief potentates of the neighbourhood in which they were going to live, and who was about to become their landlord.

They had been sustained by much righteous indignation when they broke off his engagement to Miss Lisle; but, from the look in his eyes that afternoon, she had gathered that there was also some indignation, righteous or otherwise, on his part; and, finally, she had already invited Miss Lisle to stay with them. She resolved to take counsel with her husband.

Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair were a model couple. They were childless, and therefore the more dependent on each other for companionship. They had been married for twenty-three years, and had never had a single quarrel. Mr. Sinclair had a great admiration for his wife; he admired her social cleverness, her frank vanity, her candid avowal of the motives from which she acted; he did not suppose that any women acted from any other motives. Most people thought that she had the whip hand of him, and made him do exactly what she liked; but they were mistaken. Mr. Sinclair was a good-tempered man, and did not care about trifles, in which he always gave way, but the

foundation of his character was immovable determination. His wife knew exactly how far she could go with him, and she never attempted to go any further.

On the drive home from the garden-party Mr. Sinclair was very silent, and his wife did not disturb his meditations; she was too busy with her own. In the evening, however, after they had dined, and were sitting together on the balcony of the hotel in the balmy twilight, Mr. Sinclair observed quietly, between the whiffs of his pipe—

“This is a queer state of affairs we have tumbled into to-day, Nelly!”

“It is not only queer; it is very unpleasant,” said his wife, rather sharply. “I wish we had never come here.”

“That is a very remarkable young fellow,” continued Mr. Sinclair, thoughtfully. “I had a long conversation with him, and he never once betrayed anger or resentment. He referred to the events which occurred when we last met, inquired quite calmly after Miss Lisle, and then told me that, although her action in breaking off the engagement was quite justifiable under the circumstances, yet that we had been entirely misinformed. He assures me that his mother was a Miss Vermaak, a Dutch lady of good family—which, you

will remember, was what he told us before—and that his father assumed the name of Vermaak because he left England under a cloud, and wished to hide himself. He says that he knows the young Dutchman who came to us with the other story; that it was a man who had a spite against him, and did it out of revenge; he declares that he knows nothing of the coloured people whom we saw, and that he has not a drop of coloured blood in his veins.”

“Certainly he is quite white himself,” murmured Mrs. Sinclair; “but do you think his tale can be true?”

“I do not know what to think. That Kafir woman answered questions for which she could not possibly have been prepared—so it seemed to me, at least. She had a perfect and detailed knowledge of Vermaak’s—that is, Sir John’s—personal appearance, voice, and habits. All she said was consistent, and bore the stamp of truth, and the same with the young Dutchman.”

“Did Sir John tell you that Dutchman’s name?”

“No, he did not.”

“Mrs. Carson and her son must, of course, know the truth.”

“But they will not tell it. They will, of course, support his story for their own sakes.”

“His solicitors would know the truth.”

“Yes; but they won’t tell, either. You may be sure, if the nigger tale is true, it will be kept perfectly dark. Every one has been told that Sir John’s mother was a Dutchwoman, and is dead.”

“Yes; I discovered, by a few questions, that that was the generally received story,” said Mrs. Sinclair. “But there is a great deal that puzzles me about it, all the same.”

“And me,” replied her husband.

“What did you say to Sir John?”

“What could I say? I told him that I had acted in what I believed to be the only right way; that no doubt my conduct, in making inquiries behind his back, had appeared dishonourable, but that in his absence I had no choice, and acted thus in the interests of Miss Lisle, who was, for the time being, in my charge. I added that, *if* I had been misinformed, and had thus done him a serious injury, I extremely regretted it, and should be willing to make such apology as one gentleman owed to another, and any reparation that might be in my power.”

“That ‘if’ must have nettled him rather,” observed Mrs. Sinclair.

“If it did, he did not show it. Indeed, he was rather too friendly, and I am not at all inclined to trust him. He has done up that house for us in

first-rate style, and offered me very good terms. I do not understand it, and do not like it.”

Mr. Sinclair relapsed into silence, and puffed vigorously at his pipe.

“What shall we do about Gertrude?” asked Mrs. Sinclair, presently.

“Write to her, and tell her who Sir John Fairbank is. Then let her come or not, as she likes.”

“You see,” said Mrs. Sinclair, slowly, “if what he says is really true—and if he should wish to renew the engagement—it would be a very good match for her.”

“Yes, if it were not for those ‘ifs,’” replied her husband, with a short laugh; “but the man is not likely to have really forgiven such treatment as he received from her—and us.”

“Men in love will do stranger things than that,” said Mrs. Sinclair, decidedly; “and he was desperately in love with Gertrude, there is no doubt about that.” She meditated a little, and then said, “I wonder what Mrs. Carson would do—supposing the Kafir woman is really his mother—in the event of Sir John wishing to marry a white girl.”

“Mrs. Carson could do nothing,” replied her husband. “In the event of a marriage being contemplated, the girl’s parents or guardians would have a right to demand legal proofs of his parentage. Supposing he

went so far as to forge them, no respectable firm of solicitors would be party to such a fraud."

"Are Messrs. Garrould his solicitors?"

"Yes."

"*They* would not do anything so wrong," said Mrs. Sinclair. "I have known them all my life. But Sir John might tell them that the girl knew the truth, and was satisfied to marry him."

"He would have a very difficult game to play," said her husband. "No, I do not think we need worry about that. Let Gertrude please herself."

Mrs. Sinclair, however, still wondered what Mrs. Carson would do. She was not herself a strictly conscientious woman, but she knew well enough when another woman was strictly conscientious, and she had already discovered so much about Mrs. Carson. This inclined her to think that perhaps, after all, Sir John's story was true, as otherwise Mrs. Carson must be party to a deliberate deception—a deception quite justifiable in Mrs. Sinclair's eyes, but not so, surely, in those of a strictly conscientious woman. However, she reflected that Mrs. Carson must be in a very difficult position, and might probably have had to bend to the force of circumstances.

She knew, because she corresponded regularly with Miss Lisle, that the girl had stayed with Mrs. Carson,

and, as Gertrude was not troubled with reticence, she guessed that Mrs. Carson had heard the whole story of the engagement, and probably knew that her nephew and Gertrude's lover were one and the same man. She had arrived at this conclusion when her husband's voice again broke in upon her meditations.

"What about the other young fellow?" he asked. "Reginald Carson. A very fine-looking young chap, and no doubt about the purity of *his* blood. Suppose he should take a fancy to Gertrude?"

"He has only a younger son's pittance, and no position at all now," said Mrs. Sinclair, rather contemptuously. "I should hardly think Gertrude would throw herself away like that."

"He is a very nice fellow, and could give her a comfortable home, no doubt," said Mr. Sinclair, with a rather sly side glance at his wife.

"A comfortable home! How you talk, Edward!" said his wife. "But I know you don't mean it."

"Jan Vermaak would only have given her an uncomfortable home, most probably," he replied.

"Well, you know that I was completely against the engagement from the first, only they were both so infatuated, and of course I had no authority over Gertrude. Had she been my daughter, I would never have allowed it, but she would not listen to what I said."

“My dear child, what position had I when you married me?”

“A better one than mine,” she replied, laughing a little. “My prospect in life was to go out as a governess. Besides, you had wealth, which is the road to position.”

“Well, I think we had best make up our minds to be friendly with Sir John, and take care of our own interests,” concluded Mr. Sinclair, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. “It will be time enough to think about his marriage when it comes off, and I don’t for a moment suppose that he will return to his first love, or Gertrude either, for the matter of that.”

“I don’t know so much about that,” said Mrs. Sinclair. “You must remember that Gertrude’s first love is a baronet now, and a landed proprietor.”

“That is true, too,” agreed her husband, dryly.

A few days later Mrs. Sinclair called at Sedgwick Manor. Mrs. Carson was receiving some other visitors when she arrived, but they presently left, and the two ladies were alone together. Mrs. Sinclair expressed her regrets that the two young men were out.

“I was hoping to have a little chat with Sir John,” she said, “for there was no opportunity last Wednesday. And then I wished to see more of your son, for really

I was very much struck with him. Such a very fine-looking young fellow. Is he your only son?"

"He is my only child," said Mrs. Carson, quietly.

"Ah, well! Even so you are richer than I, for I have no child," said Mrs. Sinclair, with a sigh that was not affected.

"Yes, my son is a great comfort to me," replied Mrs. Carson; "but then I lost my husband after two years of marriage."

"Indeed! and I still have mine, after twenty-three, and the best husband in the world, moreover. He would have been here to-day, but he was obliged to go up to London on business yesterday."

"I think my nephew and my son are gone to see the progress of your house," said Mrs. Carson. "I believe it is nearly ready."

"It is most good of Sir John to have done it in such beautiful style," said Mrs. Sinclair; "it is really perfect. I do not know what other landlord would have done so much for us."

"Perhaps it was partly for old acquaintance' sake," said Mrs. Carson, with—must it be owned?—a spice of sarcasm.

Mrs. Sinclair was quite equal to the occasion. "That can hardly be, I think," she replied, "as our acquaintance was but short, and not, unfortunately, altogether

of a pleasant nature. I dare say you are aware that Sir John is the same gentleman to whom our mutual friend Miss Lisle was engaged when she was with us in the Cape Colony."

"Yes, I have heard the story from Miss Lisle herself," replied Mrs. Carson, quietly.

"Yes? Then of course you know that the poor girl broke off the engagement on account of an utterly false story brought to her by a stranger, who, it now appears, was animated by a personal grudge against Sir John. Of course, Mr. Sinclair and myself upheld her in this course, and now we deeply regret it."

Mrs. Carson did not wince. "It was an unfortunate affair," she said composedly; "but as you thought you were acting for the best, you have not really anything to reproach yourself with."

"I can hardly agree with you there," said Mrs. Sinclair, "when I think that we may have interfered with the lifelong happiness of these two young people. Besides," she added, lowering her voice a little, "I am in a fresh difficulty now, for before we left London I asked Miss Lisle to come and stay with us here, as soon as we moved into our new house, having no conception, of course, as to who Sir John Fairbank would turn out to be."

"I dare say it will not signify," said Mrs. Carson,

with some appearance of indifference. "If Miss Lisle does not wish to meet my nephew, she will, no doubt, stay away when she hears who he is. If she comes, I do not suppose that my nephew will object to meet her, or act in any way so as to make her uncomfortable."

"Oh, of course not *that*," said Mrs. Sinclair, earnestly ; "there could be no fear of that. But I was afraid it might be painful and awkward for both of them."

"If they do not wish to meet they will contrive to keep apart," said Mrs. Carson.

"But then, again," said Mrs. Sinclair, with some apparent hesitation, "there is another consideration, though perhaps a very improbable one. Supposing that they should still be attached to one another, and that Sir John should be willing to overlook the past?"

"I think, as you say, that is highly improbable," replied Mrs. Carson, stiffly. "A hastily formed attachment, such as theirs seems to have been, is not at all likely to survive such a shock as theirs has sustained. I have no doubt they will be able to meet as ordinary acquaintances, without much difficulty on either side."

The entrance of fresh visitors brought the conversation to a close, and Mrs. Sinclair took her departure. As she drove homewards, she said to herself—

"I don't believe that woman is as clever as I am."

Yet I couldn't get any change out of her to-day; and I am no nearer the truth than before."

Mrs. Sinclair was perfectly right. Mrs. Carson was in no sense a clever diplomatist. She was simply a woman of great natural dignity and reticence, and intensely loyal to her own relatives, her nephew above all, because he was now the head of the family. She had promised not to betray Jan, and she would never do it, by word or sign. Mrs. Sinclair was never likely, as she elegantly expressed it, to get any change at all out of Mrs. Carson.

A fortnight later the Sinclairs took possession of their new abode. Mrs. Carson was the first to call upon them; and Mrs. Sinclair took the first opportunity of informing her that Miss Lisle was coming to stay with them in a week's time, in spite of the spectre that had been raised to frighten her away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REGINALD had not forgotten his promise to correspond with the Robertsons. He had written to Mrs. Robertson directly after his arrival at home, and again, since then, to her husband. He wrote very cheerfully, speaking only of the bright side of things—of Jan's interest in his property, his popularity with his tenants, the mutual liking between him and his aunt, the favourable weather that had allowed him to see the country to the best advantage, and so on. By return mail he received a long chatty letter from Mrs. Robertson, containing just the little details of home life that his soul longed for, and that brought vividly—almost too vividly—before him the pleasant colonial homestead, with its freedom, its absence of luxury, its wild natural surroundings, where he had learned so much, both of happiness and sorrow. The letter concluded with a few words of affectionate remembrance from all, and a promise to write again.

Reginald showed the letter to his mother. "It is

really very good of Mrs. Robertson," he said, "with all she has to do, to sit down and write such a nice long letter."

"Mrs. Robertson is a very good woman," replied his mother, smiling. "I shall bless her all my life for the kindness she showed to you."

After reading the letter, she observed, "Yes, it is a nice letter, and the letter of a lady."

"Mrs. Robertson is a thorough lady," said Reginald, rather warmly. "She could not be more so if she were a duchess."

"Yes; well," said his mother, "I have often thought lately that it is a great fault to be too exclusive. After all, on what grounds can we set ourselves above any one who has right feeling, and tries to do his duty? Now, especially," she concluded with a sigh.

"I quite agree with you, mother," said Reginald, for these sentiments were after his own heart. "A gentleman can be nothing more than a gentleman, if he is a king; and a lady can be nothing more than a lady, if she is a queen. I learned that, if I learned nothing else, on my travels."

"You learned enough to last you a lifetime, I think," said Mrs. Carson, smiling and sighing. "You must never neglect to write to Mrs. Robertson from time to time."

There was not much fear of that. Reginald had not forgotten May Robertson; almost every waking hour of his life his thoughts returned to her, sometimes with such a strong yearning that it seemed as if desire so intense must needs bring its own fulfilment. Neither had he, in fact, given up hope, although he often tried to persuade himself that he had done so. It had sometimes seemed to him lately that Jan spoke of the future as if he were making up his mind to live in England, at all events for two or three years; in that case, when he had settled down and got used to English life, so as to be less dependent on his cousin, Reginald might be able to leave England again for a few months—long enough to make one effort to woo and win his bride. His mother would let him go willingly enough if he told her all about it—what a charming daughter she would have in May, and how dearly he loved her. Sometimes he dreamed thus, and sometimes he thrust all these dreams away, and sternly resolved to dream no more—with what success, let those judge who have been in a like case.

As soon as the Sinclairs had put their house in order, they gave a house-warming in the form of a garden-party. It was not, of course, on such an ambitious scale as the one at Sedgwick Manor; but a good many guests were invited, nevertheless, for

Mrs. Sinclair, who had been born and brought up at Moxton, knew several families in the neighbourhood.

Miss Lisle arrived on the morning of the day that the garden-party was to take place, and Mr. Sinclair went to the station to fetch her.

"Am I to prepare her mind for the fact that she is to meet Sir John this very afternoon?" he asked.

"Oh, she knows it already," said Mrs. Sinclair; "and I don't think that Gertrude, at all events, will be much discomposed by the meeting. It seems to me that her letters lately have been rather full of a certain Mr. Nasmyth, of Birmingham, whose acquaintance she made at Wiesbaden."

"Well, if she arrived already engaged to another man, it might save trouble," remarked Mr. Sinclair.

"I don't suppose it has gone as far as that; but I would much rather, on the whole, that she did not have any further entanglement with Sir John."

"I quite agree with you," said her husband, departing.

It was now the end of September. The summer had been hot and dry, and therefore the leaves had already begun to change colour. The beech trees, first to turn, glowed with crimson and red; the elm trees showed pale yellow patches; the oaks a deep rich

brown. The Sinclairs' house was partly covered in front by a Virginian creeper, which seemed as if on fire with its own gorgeous hue. Jan, who had never happened to see one before, was much struck with it, and paused halfway up the garden path to admire it.

Mr. Sinclair observed him, and came to meet him. "We have at least one thing that you have not, Sir John," he said, referring to the Virginian creeper.

"I dare say you have a good many," said Jan, pleasantly, "but nothing prettier than that." And then, perceiving Mrs. Sinclair on the lawn, with Miss Lisle by her side, he went straight across to speak to them.

Reginald was not near enough to see Miss Lisle's face; he only saw her bow to Jan, and hold out her hand, and noticed that she had a very pretty figure. When he went to speak to Mrs. Sinclair himself, she had moved away.

About half an hour later, however, Mr. Sinclair came and asked him to play a set of tennis, and then introduced him to Miss Lisle as his partner. She was decidedly a pretty girl, with a quantity of wavy nut-brown hair, liquid grey eyes, and an exquisite complexion. Reginald, however, thought her face wanting in expression and animation.

He found her a rather listless partner in tennis; but,

as he played well enough for both, they won the set by one game.

"Are you tired, Miss Lisle?" asked Reginald, thinking that perhaps she was not very strong. "Here is a nice shady seat. Can I bring you some lemonade?"

"Yes, thank you," said Miss Lisle, sinking rather languidly on to the seat to which he conducted her.

And Reginald went to fetch the lemonade, wondering rather within himself what Jan had found so attractive in this die-away young lady. However, when he returned, and seated himself beside her, she brightened up, and became lively and talkative.

"How long were you in South Africa, Mr. Carson?" she asked.

"About ten months," said Reginald.

"Indeed! Then you must have seen a good deal of the country?"

"Yes. I travelled about a good deal; but for two months out of the ten I was laid up with a broken leg."

"Oh, that was unfortunate! How did it happen?"

"I was capsized out of a cart."

"In Port Elizabeth?"

"No; I was staying in the Karoo then. The accident happened close to my cousin's farm, and I was laid up there."

“Was that after you found out that he was your cousin?”

“No; I discovered it while I was staying with him.”

“Really! It is quite romantic, is it not? But how was it that your uncle disappeared so completely, Mr. Carson?”

“Well, Miss Lisle, when he was a young man he was rather wild, as young men sometimes will be, and his father was very angry with him. I suppose, when he left England, he thought that he would never be received into favour again, and that the best thing he could do was to disappear.”

“But that seems very hard,” said Miss Lisle, thoughtfully. “Because he would have kept his son out of his rights.”

“True; but perhaps he thought his son would be better without them, or that he would not be welcome in his English home. That was a mistake, of course; but people will make these mistakes. And he left John very well off, in any case.”

“Yes, so I suppose. Does Sir John still own that farm? I forget the name of it.”

“Yes,” said Reginald. “He has left some one in charge of it.”

“Is it a nice place?”

“It is a very good farm, and very nice for those who like the Karoo. I do not know if you would like it.”

“I suppose Sir John will not go back to it now?”

“I do not know, Miss Lisle. I should think he would be sure to go back there some time; but I cannot tell where he will decide to live. I do not suppose he knows that himself yet.”

“Perhaps he will spend half the year in one place, and half in the other,” suggested Miss Lisle.

“That is quite possible,” said Reginald. He saw that his companion was trying to pump him, and he turned the subject of conversation, wishing neither to give information nor to say what was not true.

Mrs. Sinclair presently came and requisitioned him for more tennis; and after he had played another set, he observed that Jan, who did not play tennis, had taken his place beside Miss Lisle, and that they were conversing together, apparently with the greatest ease and pleasure. Miss Lisle's cheeks were slightly flushed, and her eyes sparkled; Reginald could see now that she might be very attractive, especially to a man who had known scarcely any Englishwomen.

Seeing his mother standing near him, he went up to her and called her attention to the young couple.

“Yes,” she said, “I have already noticed them; and, do you know, Reginald, I feel very uneasy. I really

fear that John is still in love with her; and if he wants to become engaged to her again, I am afraid she will come to me to know the truth about his mother. I could not deceive the girl, and yet I cannot break my promise to John."

"The only way out of that difficulty," said Reginald, "would be to induce John to tell her the truth himself."

"I doubt if we could do that. I am sure we could not, indeed."

"We could but try," replied Reginald. "I shall, if it ever comes to that."

They could not continue the subject then, and indeed it seemed useless to discuss it at this stage. Jan attached himself rather openly to Miss Lisle during the remainder of the afternoon, and it was a relief both to Reginald and his mother when the time came to depart home.

During the remainder of that week Jan was at Framleigh every day; and one day, by his invitation, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair and Miss Lisle came to luncheon, and spent the afternoon at the Manor. Jan's attentions to Miss Lisle were unmistakable, and they did not seem to be altogether unacceptable to her. Mrs. Carson was greatly distressed, and poured forth her distress to Reginald after their guests had left, accompanied by Jan, who insisted on escorting them home.

“Somehow I do not like Miss Lisle as much as I did,” she said regretfully. “She seems to me to have disimproved since she has been in Germany.”

“I cannot help thinking,” said Reginald, with a little hesitation, “that she must be rather a shallow-natured girl. Her telling you so freely all about her engagement seems to show it; and then, although she must have suspected that I should have learned the story from you, the very first time we met she asked me all sorts of questions about John and his farm, and in fact tried to get the family history out of me. I thought it was bad taste, to say the least.”

“So it was,” sighed Mrs. Carson. “Well, we are in a dreadful difficulty now, and I cannot see what is to be done.”

“I must speak to Jan about it,” said Reginald, quietly; “although it will be anything but pleasant, and I do not know how I shall introduce the subject.”

Jan, however, introduced the subject himself that same evening, after dinner. He always went outside to smoke a pipe, and Reginald generally accompanied him, though he did not smoke. The evenings were now growing chilly, and Mrs. Carson retired to the drawing-room.

“Reginald,” said Jan, when they had strolled along for a few minutes in silence, “I do not at all like the

idea of your mother and yourself ever leaving this place. It would be especially rough on Aunt Alicia, since it has been her home almost all her life. Supposing I were to marry. Could you not still live here? The house is very large, and you could have quite separate rooms if you liked."

"Still, I hardly think it would do," said Reginald, quietly. "Are you thinking of marrying?"

"Yes. Didn't you know it?"

"I suppose you mean," said Reginald, off his guard, "that you wish to renew your engagement with Miss Lisle."

"How did you know I was engaged to her before?" asked Jan.

Reginald was taken aback, but the simple truth served him best.

"Mother told me so," he said.

"And she learned it from Mrs. Sinclair, of course," said Jan, rather bitterly. "I suppose women can never keep these things to themselves."

"She learned it from Miss Lisle herself," said Reginald, looking round at his cousin to see the effect of his words.

"The deuce she did!" exclaimed Jan, angrily. Then, after a short silence, "Well, I suppose Aunt Alicia is the sort of woman that girls tell their love affairs to. I can't wonder at it."

"All the same, I prefer the girl who doesn't tell them," observed Reginald, dryly.

"Ah!" said Jan, "you don't want to marry Miss Lisle yourself, then?"

"No, thank you," said Reginald; and Jan laughed good-humouredly.

"All the better for me," he said. "I should not like to have you for a rival."

Reginald wondered within himself if he could ever discuss May Robertson in this manner with any one, and shrank from the thought. But he had yet his duty to fulfil.

"Jan," he said gently, "I am afraid you are only preparing unhappiness both for yourself and Miss Lisle."

"How so?" asked Jan, sullenly.

"Because you want to marry her under false pretences. You have made her believe that your mother was a white woman."

"Yes, because if she knows that my mother is a black woman, she won't marry me. And I *want* her."

Reginald shuddered at the fierce passion with which he spoke, striking his heel into the gravel. A feeling of positive repugnance to his cousin came over him for a moment; he drove it back.

"Jan," he said earnestly, "will you listen patiently

to me for a minute, and not be angry with me for what I am going to say ? ”

“ Go on, then,” said Jan, shortly.

“ You want to marry Miss Lisle,” continued Reginald, “ just for your own gratification, as if you were some wild animal, without thinking at all about her happiness, or the whole of her future life. You might make her happy, and be happy yourself, for a short time ; but how could it last ? Supposing she were to have a coloured child ? You know yourself it is far from unlikely.”

Jan stamped on the gravel again, but said nothing.

“ She would then hate you,” said Reginald ; “ the more bitterly because she had loved you, and you had deceived her. She would feel that her whole life was spoilt, and would very likely leave you. I am not drawing an exaggerated picture ; it is what might only too easily happen. Do you think it is worth while to risk it ? ”

“ I am going to risk it, any way,” said Jan.

“ But how can you support your story ? ” asked Reginald. “ Miss Lisle has guardians. They will require proofs.”

“ I can manage that,” replied Jan, coolly. “ I shall not marry her here, and I can easily contrive to take in her guardians—until after the wedding, anyhow.

Unless," he added sharply, "you mean to play the Dutch spy, and betray me behind my back."

Reginald turned suddenly cold. Did Jan know that he would understand the meaning of those words? Could he possibly know that Reginald suspected his guilt? He glanced at his cousin, but could not see his face clearly in the darkness. He chose his next words carefully.

"I am not going to do anything behind your back, John," he said steadily. "If I were capable of that, I should not say all this to your face. If I intended to go to Miss Lisle and tell her the truth, I should give you fair warning."

"And why do you not do so?" asked Jan, rather curiously.

"I cannot, because I promised you that I would tell no one. But, Jan, I implore you to reconsider this. If you really love Miss Lisle, you surely would not run the risk of causing her lifelong misery. Think what suffering you might cause her. Why not tell her the truth honestly, and ask her to marry you all the same?"

"Because I am not such a fool," said Jan, roughly. "It is just because I really love her, which you seem to doubt, that I won't run the chance of losing her. Now look here, Reginald," he continued, standing still, and

turning towards his cousin, "I have listened to you patiently, because you asked me—I wouldn't have done it for any other man ; I would have knocked him down. Now listen to me, and answer my questions. Do you expect me to remain unmarried all my life ?"

"No, I don't expect it," said Reginald, quietly, with a slight emphasis on the word "expect."

"Well, then, I don't want to marry a Kafir—you can hardly blame me for that. No white girl who is any good will marry me if she knows that my mother is a Kafir. Isn't that so ?"

"She might," said Reginald, "if she cared about you enough."

"She wouldn't, and you know it," said Jan, savagely. "Well, then, who am I to marry ? A half-caste, like myself ?"

His tone was indescribably bitter. Reginald felt too sorry to be angry.

"I know it is awfully rough on you, Jan," he said gently ; "but, indeed, I only care about your happiness, and that of the girl you marry. I *know* that a marriage based on deception cannot be happy for long ; and in this case the deception is almost certain to come out."

"Reginald," said Jan, "if you were in my place, what would you do ?"

“If the girl I loved would not marry me, I would remain unmarried,” said Reginald.

“You would tell that girl the truth about yourself?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Jan. “Wait till you *want* to be married, and then see how you feel about it. I tell you, Reginald, I *will* have that girl, I *must* have her, so it is no use for you to say anything. Perhaps you are thinking,” he added bitterly, “that if I remain unmarried, you and your children will come in for the property?”

“The property would belong to your brother and his children,” replied Reginald, very quietly; “but if you think *that* is my motive, it is certainly of no use for me to say anything.”

He turned and went indoors. Jan stayed outside until late, and when he came in he went straight to his room. Before he went, however, he said aside to Reginald—

“Reginald, old chap, I beg your pardon. I didn’t think *that*, really. Shake hands.”

Reginald willingly did so, of course; but he went to his own room very heavy-hearted.

Jan’s unusual friendliness towards the Sinclairs was now explained. He had, no doubt, from the very first, expected and intended through them to renew his

acquaintance with Miss Lisle, for whom he still entertained an overmastering passion. He had striven in every way to enlist them on his side, and even to place them in such a position that they would not care to offend him. Hence his anxiety to have them for his tenants, and the extraordinary interest he had taken in preparing their house. Perhaps Mr. Sinclair was one of Miss Lisle's guardians. Reginald pondered over Jan's assertion that he could elude the guardians until after the wedding, and he saw that he might do it without much difficulty, if the Sinclairs believed him, and Reginald himself and his mother kept silence. In that case, how justly at any time Miss Lisle might reproach them for their silence, when she discovered that she had been really deceived!

But that was not all. Jan's words about the Dutch spy had awakened all his old doubts and questions. It was not only because Jan's mother was a Kafir that his probable marriage appeared such a disaster. It was because Jan was a ruthless murderer, in whose hands no girl could safely trust her life's happiness. The marriage must be prevented at any cost—yet how? By his silence, preserved until it was too late to speak—by his promise, too hastily given—Reginald had deprived himself of the power to act. Supposing he told Jan that he suspected his guilt? He would gain

nothing, for Jan would only deny it, and afterwards mistrust him, and Reginald would lose what influence he had with him.

That was the one gleam of hope for him in the whole wretched business, that he had some influence with his cousin. Jan had listened patiently to him, when he would have knocked another man down. Perhaps, then, he might even yet be able to make him listen to some better pleadings than those of his own sensual desires. He resolved to try again.

CHAPTER XIX.

“GERTRUDE,” said Mr. Sinclair, entering the room where his wife and Miss Lisle were sitting at work one morning, three days after the garden-party—“Gertrude, I have received a note from a Mr. George Nasmyth, who is staying at Moxton, and who claims to be a friend of yours, on the strength of which he asks leave to call.”

Miss Lisle did not blush, or appear in any way confused.

“Yes, we met him at Wiesbaden,” she said composedly, “and found him a very pleasant acquaintance ; and I met him again in London. He is quite a gentleman, I think. I have no objection to his calling.”

“I may give him permission, then ?”

“As far as I am concerned—yes.”

“Who is he—do you know ?”

“He is the only son of a rich hardware manufacturer in Birmingham, and has a share in the business, I

believe. His mother was a Miss Glynn, daughter of Sir Frederick Glynn, of some place near Birmingham."

"Oh, well, it's something to know who his mother is, anyhow," said Mr. Sinclair, dryly, as he went out of the room.

"It seems, then," said Mrs. Sinclair, when he was gone, "that this Mr. Nasmyth has been following in your tracks—eh, Gertrude?"

"He had business in London—at least he said so," replied Gertrude.

"But he travelled home in your party?"

"He came home at the same time—yes."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Sinclair said, without any circumlocution—

"Has he proposed?"

"No," said Gertrude.

"But he will do so?"

"I suppose so—if I let him."

"You have encouraged him, however?"

"I have been friendly with him. No one could say more than that."

"If we only knew for certain about Sir John!" sighed Mrs. Sinclair.

"I can see that Mr. Sinclair does not believe him," said Gertrude, regretfully.

"Edward believes no one," said Mrs. Sinclair. "I

often tell him his name should have been Thomas. He has a twin sister, too. I told him some days ago that he ought to write to his partners in Port Elizabeth, and ask them to make inquiries. They could soon find out the truth about Sir John. But he says he cannot do so until Sir John declares himself. I don't see why not, myself."

"And it takes so long to write and get an answer all that distance," sighed Gertrude. "Six weeks!"

"They could send a cablegram," said Mrs. Sinclair; "it could easily be worded so as to betray nothing. But, my dear Gertrude," she added, "let me warn you that you are playing a dangerous game. It is, of course, perfectly legitimate to consider which of two men you like best, and which is the most likely to give you what you want, and make you happy; but, for Heaven's sake, do not fall between two stools."

"I must do the best I can for myself," said Gertrude.

"Of course. And it is not a bad plan to keep them both in uncertainty a little while, if you can. Only take care, that is all."

Miss Lisle made no reply to this, but she looked as if she thought she was quite able to manage her own affairs. She was decidedly attracted by Sir John Fairbank, and had quite a tender recollection of the few

weeks that she had been engaged to him ; and yet she was a little bit afraid of him. If his story should not be true ! She thought of the Kafir woman, and shuddered.

On the other hand, Mr. Nasmyth was really very nice, and there was no doubt about his intentions. There were no mysteries about him ; he had no undesirable connections, and, as Mr. Sinclair had just now said, it really was a satisfaction to know who his mother was. And yet the spice of mystery, of romance, of strangeness about Sir John added in one way to the attraction he exercised over her. Sometimes this feeling got the upper hand of her cool common-sense, but never for long. Romance, she reflected, was not a good foundation for married life. Miss Lisle, for her years, had quite a remarkable amount of worldly wisdom.

That same afternoon, Mrs. Sinclair being engaged, Miss Lisle, left to her own resources, went for a walk in the plantation by herself. There was a gate into the plantation exactly opposite the gate of Framleigh, and Jan had twice ridden that way across the park and through the trees. It was not on this account, however, but because it was a warm afternoon, and the plantation was cool and pleasant, that Gertrude, book in hand, went for a stroll there. It was therefore quite a surprise to her when she heard the soft thud of hoofs

on the turf, and the next minute found herself face to face with Jan, who, reining in his horse suddenly at the sight of her, stood for a moment like some magnificent equestrian statue. Then he dismounted and came to meet her, with a look in his face which made Gertrude almost wish that she had not courted this interview. It was too late now, however, and she summoned all her self-command to preserve her usual cool composure.

“I was just coming to see you, Miss Lisle,” said Jan, taking her hand and holding it.

“Mrs. Sinclair is engaged this afternoon, and I came here to sit and read,” said Gertrude. “It is so pleasant.”

She gently tried to draw away her hand, but he tightened his clasp.

“It is pleasant here,” he said, in a tone full of meaning; “but you shall not read; you shall listen to me instead. Gertrude, cannot we undo the past?”

She was not ready with a reply, and he caught both her hands in his and broke into passionate pleadings, such as he had used when he first made love to her on that far South African shore.

“I thought when I read your cruel letter that day,” he said, “that I was able to hate you; and, although it was like death not to see you again, I would not go to

you on board. Then, too late, I repented, and rushed down to the harbour, only to see the *Scot* already on the horizon. I did not know where to write to you, and pride held me back, for if I had written and you had again scorned me, I should have killed myself. After that I found out how I had been betrayed and you deceived with false tales, and I gave up all hope and tried to forget you ; but I was wretched. Even when I had the chance to come to England, I did not want to come, for I feared to meet you again, and I thought you would hate and despise me. Then, when I came, and fortune almost immediately brought you in my way—I began to hope again—I could see you and your friends face to face, and convince you of the falseness of the Dutchman, and try and win your love back again. Don't tell me I have failed, Gertrude. Say you believe me ; say you still love me. I cannot live without you now ! ”

Gertrude drew herself away from him this time, not without difficulty, and stood, with her eyes cast down, a few paces from him.

“ I do not know what to say, Sir John,” she began in a low voice that trembled a little, “ or what to think. You must believe me when I say that I suffered keenly when I wrote you that letter ; but of course I firmly believed that you had deceived me, and I acted under

my friends' advice. After that I resolved to think of you no more, except as unworthy even of my regret. When I met you again as Sir John Fairbank, and heard your strange story, I was quite bewildered; indeed, I am so still."

Jan drew nearer to her, and looked down at her with burning eyes.

"Then you do not believe me even now?" he said reproachfully. "Look at me, Gertrude."

She looked up at him for a moment, but the passion in his face frightened her, and she looked down again.

"I do not say that," she replied gently; "I could hardly disbelieve you now. But my guardians would never allow me to give you any definite promise until you had first produced proofs that would satisfy *them*."

"Then *you* are satisfied?" he said, his face brightening.

"I cannot doubt you," replied Gertrude, with another quick, shy glance at the eager, handsome face bending over her; "but indeed," she added, with a bewitching, bashful hesitation in her voice and manner—"indeed, Sir John, I am not quite sure myself how I feel about it all now. You must give me a little time."

"It is not a year since you said you loved me," he replied rather gloomily. "Have you unlearned it so soon?"

"But it is such a short time since we met again,"

said Gertrude, resuming her usual collected manner. "You must make a little allowance for me, and not think me unkind because I cannot answer you now."

Jan composed himself with a visible effort; and as she turned and walked along the path, he kept at her side silently, leading his horse. Presently she said, with a slight hesitation—

"Sir John, how did you find out who it was that had betrayed you?"

"Oh, I guessed it easily enough," he replied shortly. "There was only one man who could have done it—only one that had a spite against me. I went and taxed him with it, and he owned it."

"You did not—hurt him?" asked Gertrude, anxiously.

Jan smiled grimly. "Not much," he replied quietly. "I did knock him down, but he got over it in two or three minutes, and has been none the worse since."

"I am glad of that," said Gertrude, relieved.

They reached the plantation gate.

"Will you come in, Sir John?" said Gertrude. "I think Mrs. Sinclair will be at liberty now."

"No, I will not come in to-day," he answered abruptly; "since I have seen you, that is all I want. Gertrude," he continued passionately, "my darling, when will you answer me? Do not keep me waiting long. If I come to-morrow will you tell me?"

He laid his two hands on her shoulders and forced her to look at him; but, brought face to face with a decision, Gertrude recoiled.

“Oh, not so soon,” she said hurriedly. “In a week—next week I will tell you.”

“A week! Why must I be kept in suspense a whole week?” said Jan. “Surely your own heart can tell you whether you love me or not!”

But Gertrude remained firm. “You must give me a week, please, Sir John,” she said, with a look which she knew quite well he could not resist.

She was not prepared for the result, however. Jan, unaccustomed to control his passions, and quite free from any regard for conventional proprieties, caught her suddenly in his arms and kissed her passionately again and again. Gertrude was perfectly helpless in his powerful clasp, and would not utter a sound, for she would rather have died than that any one should find her in this dilemma. She could only submit until Jan released her of his own accord, and then she slipped through the plantation gate and across the lane into the Sinclairs’ garden with most unusual rapidity. There she paused behind the bushes to smooth her disordered hair and dress, and to recover her usual calm self-possession before entering the house.

She was not in the least angry with Sir John for his

outrageous behaviour. She liked being made love to, provided it did not lead to any immediate consequences, and she reflected with satisfaction that she had not been beguiled or hurried into giving any definite promise. She had still the option of refusing him in the end. In the mean time it gratified her vanity intensely that she had awakened such a passionate adoration in the breast of a man so handsome and of such good position as Sir John Fairbank; and she rather despised herself now, on looking back, for having yielded with such comparative ease to his pleadings when he was only Jan Vermaak.

When she felt sufficiently composed, and her cheeks were quite cool again, she entered the drawing-room, where she found Mrs. Sinclair entertaining Mr. Nasmyth, who rose eagerly when he saw her, and greeted her with evident pleasure. He was a very ordinary-looking young fellow, with dark hair and moustache, very correctly dressed, and with a rather dandified air. Gertrude was not in the humour for him just then, and her greeting was rather cool; but it was not possible for her to be long in the company of any man without trying to fascinate him, and in five minutes they were recalling the various incidents of their travels, and dwelling on past scenes with such evident enjoyment, that Mrs. Sinclair contrived to slip out of the room and leave them alone for a time.

“After all it might be a safer match for dear Gertrude than Sir John,” she observed to her husband. “He is very rich, and a gentlemanly young fellow, and we know all about him. And Sir John is such a strange man.”

“Sir John has more character than fifty Nasmyths,” said Mr. Sinclair, who had seen Mr. Nasmyth for about ten minutes, and taken his measure accurately; “but I quite agree with you that Nasmyth is a safer match for Gertrude.”

Perhaps Gertrude thought so too; in any case, Mr. Nasmyth dined and spent the evening at Framleigh, and afterwards accepted an invitation to spend a few days there in the following week.

CHAPTER XX.

JAN did not go again to Framleigh for two or three days. He was afraid, for one thing, that he might have offended Miss Lisle by his unruly behaviour, and thought it best to stay away for a little while ; besides, as he could not know his fate for a week, there was not much satisfaction in spending his time at Framleigh, meanwhile.

He was not without occupation, moreover, and he did not neglect any of the work connected with his position as a landowner. Besides this, there was plenty of game in Jan's preserves, and as both he and Reginald were first-rate shots, and enjoyed the sport, they often went out together with their guns. At Reginald's suggestion, Jan gave one or two shooting-parties, which were much more in his line than garden-parties, and at which, therefore, he made an excellent host. He was, as Mrs. Bennett had predicted, quite popular in the neighbourhood ; not less so, perhaps, because no one altogether understood him, and he never made any approach to intimacy with any one.

On the Monday following the interview between himself and Miss Lisle in the plantation, Jan proposed to Reginald that they should go out for a day's shooting together. Reginald agreed willingly. He had observed that Jan had not been to Framleigh for the last few days, and augured well from the fact. Moreover, in spite of his intense preoccupation with Miss Lisle, he had lost none of his admiring affection for his cousin, and could still enjoy a whole day spent in his sole company.

It was a perfect autumn day. There had been a slight frost in the early morning, and every blade of grass, every gossamer thread on the silent, sunny hillside, sparkled with countless diamond drops. The mild, penetrating warmth of the sun, the crisp freshness of the calm, wide air, were full of peace and repose. It seemed as if Nature were quietly laying herself down, ready for her winter sleep. The mad passions and foolish strifes of men seemed to have no place in this fair world of rest and still brightness.

Jan and Reginald walked far in silence. Both seemed to feel the influence of the morning, and not to wish to break it, even by the sound of their own voices. Reginald's thoughts wandered far away to the arid Karoo, now basking in the heat of early summer, and

before his mind floated a very different picture to that which his eyes dwelt upon. He had written again to Mrs. Robertson yesterday, and had ventured to send a message of remembrance to Miss Robertson in particular, not including her in the general family circle. Jan's marriage, should it ever come off, would at least leave him free to think about his own; yet he could not, for that reason, wish that his cousin might rush upon his fate.

"What are you thinking about so deeply, Reginald?" said Jan, breaking the silence at last.

"All sorts of things," replied Reginald, recalling his thoughts with an effort. "And you?"

"I was forecasting the future," said Jan, "and thinking what scurvy tricks Dame Fortune plays us. She gives a man everything that his heart can desire, and blights it all with an irrevocable curse."

"Sometimes a man can turn a curse into a blessing," observed Reginald.

"As how?" asked Jan.

"When he has the opportunity of leading a noble and useful life," replied Reginald, quietly. "A man is not a puppet, after all. He has his fate, more or less, in his own hands."

"I don't agree with you," said Jan. "How can a man control his fate?"

“Not by gratifying his first desires,” said Reginald, in a low voice.

“It is easy for you to talk,” said Jan, without anger. “You are not under a curse; and I don’t believe you know what desire means.”

“Still, with a little imagination,” said Reginald, “I can think what I would do if I were under a curse, as you call it.”

“And what would you do?”

“I would *make* every one whom I knew bless me.”

Jan looked at him with shining eyes. “I believe you would,” he said. “How would you do it?”

“By trying to gratify every one’s desires except my own.”

To this Jan made no reply, and as they had now reached the covers where they intended to shoot, the conversation was brought to an end. Reginald’s words had come from his heart. He could not tell whether they had made any impression on his cousin or not.

They had a good day’s sport, and delivered a heavy game-bag to the boy who had followed them to carry home. They themselves took a short cut across the fields, which brought them out into the lane close to the gate of Framleigh. Jan was seized with a sudden and uncontrollable desire to see Gertrude.

“Let us call at Framleigh for a few minutes,” he said.

“What, in this guise?” said Reginald, looking down at his dusty shooting-suit and gaiters.

“Why not?” said Jan. “They will see what we have been doing, and they won’t mind. Come on.”

Reginald went, much against his inclination. They found the Sinclairs having afternoon tea in their pretty, cosy drawing-room. Gertrude was there, and also Mr. Nasmyth.

Jan was not even aware of the existence of Mr. Nasmyth, and, on being introduced to him, he greeted him with that frigid indifference which he usually showed to perfect strangers. In fact, he had eyes for no one except Gertrude. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Nasmyth was in the same case; and not having the remotest idea that Sir John Fairbank was his rival, he was as assiduous in his attentions to Miss Lisle as usual.

Jan was not long in noticing it, and his brow darkened; but he sat very quietly, and talked to Mr. Sinclair about his day’s sport. Reginald talked to Mrs. Sinclair, sitting on thorns all the time, for he could see the whole of the little drama that was going on under his eyes, and the thought flashed into his mind, might it not develop into a tragedy?

Gertrude’s behaviour, however, was irreproachable. She was demure, sedate, and carefully polite to every

one. She brought Jan his tea, and answered his eager glance with a serene smile. Jan never drank tea, but he would have drunk strychnine without knowing it that afternoon, had Miss Lisle brought it to him. He watched her every movement, and heard every word of the polite nothings that passed between her and Mr. Nasmyth. Finally, she seated herself beside Mrs. Sinclair, and joined in the conversation between her and Reginald. Mr. Nasmyth addressed himself to Sir John.

“Have you begun to feel at home in England, Sir John? I suppose you have by now.”

“Well, hardly,” said Jan. “I have still much to learn. Do you live in this neighbourhood, Mr. Nasmyth?”

The question came abruptly, and Mr. Nasmyth felt rather as if some cold water had been dashed in his face.

“No,” he replied; “my home is near Birmingham—Hynde Hall is the name of my father’s place. You do not know Birmingham, of course?”

“I do not know any place in England but this,” said Jan. “How far away is Birmingham?”

“From this? Oh, a good way. Four or five hours by rail.”

“And you are staying here?”

“Yes, for a little while. I was staying in Moxton, and Mrs. Sinclair kindly asked me here for a few days. I am taking a holiday just now.”

“A holiday—from what?”

Mr. Nasmyth felt as if he were being catechized; but he was never rude, especially to a baronet.

“From business,” he said, with a smile. “My father has a big factory in Birmingham, but he has retired from active partnership, and expects me to do the work now.”

“Do you know the Sinclairs well?” asked Jan.

“On the contrary, I have only just made their acquaintance, through Miss Lisle, whom I met at Wiesbaden about four months ago. They seem to be very charming people. Did you know them before they came here?”

Mr. Nasmyth felt that it was his turn to ask a question; but he did not get much satisfaction. Jan said “Yes,” in a very absent manner, and then rose suddenly from his seat and went across the room to where Mrs. Sinclair was sitting on a couch. She made room for him beside her, and turned to speak to him with her sweetest smile.

Reginald asked Miss Lisle to give them some music, and thereupon they both moved away to the piano, where Mr. Nasmyth joined them. Under cover of the

music, Jan said to Mrs. Sinclair, in his most abrupt manner—

“Mrs. Sinclair, is Mr. Nasmyth courting Miss Lisle?”

“My dear Sir John,” said Mrs. Sinclair, taken aback by this plain speaking, “I am not at all acquainted with the state of Mr. Nasmyth’s feelings. Most men admire Gertrude; she is a very attractive girl.”

“Mrs. Sinclair,” said Jan, very earnestly, “you are well aware—you must be—that I wish to renew the engagement which was so cruelly broken off a few months back. I have counted on your support, I have hoped all along that you were my friend, and now I find that you have invited a man to stay in the house who evidently wishes to be regarded as Miss Lisle’s lover.”

“But, my dear friend,” remonstrated Mrs. Sinclair, “you go on too fast. We invited Mr. Nasmyth here for a few days because he was staying alone in Moxton, which seemed rather dull for a young man. He is a friend of Gertrude’s, and no doubt, as I say, admires her; but you must not think too much of that. A man often admires a charming girl and pays her little attentions without being so desperately serious as you are,” she added, with a smile.

“Why was he staying in Moxton?” asked Jan.

“Only to see Gertrude. He could have had no other reason.”

“He may have been doing business for his father.”

“He was not doing business ; he is taking a holiday. He told me so himself,” said Jan, shortly. Then, after a pause, “Is Mr. Sinclair one of Miss Lisle’s guardians ?”

“He is now. He has lately been appointed in place of one who died. But Gertrude will be of age next year.”

The music ceased, and their voices became too audible. Mrs. Sinclair deftly turned the conversation, but her mind, while she poured forth polite small-talk, was busily engaged with the previous conversation. She felt herself in a somewhat delicate position. She was anxious not to offend Sir John, who was their landlord, and a very good one ; and who, moreover, might be a most useful friend. On the other hand, she really thought it would be better for Gertrude to marry Mr. Nasmyth, who, with his wealth and his father’s influence, might easily attain some day a position quite equal to Sir John’s ; and she had undoubtedly furthered his suit. Gertrude herself had been very close lately, and Mrs. Sinclair did not know which way the wind was blowing, so that she had to steer her way rather carefully. She began to feel rather annoyed with

Gertrude for having placed her in this predicament, and decided that, on the whole, it would be best to assume an air of injured innocence with Sir John. So when, on taking leave of her, he said aside, in a somewhat imperious manner, "Are you not going to be my friend, Mrs. Sinclair?" she replied, with an assumption of dignity, "Of course I am your friend, Sir John; but you must really consider that Gertrude is old enough to know her own mind, and, moreover, that she is a sensitive girl, with a great deal of character. I cannot speak to her on so delicate a subject; and I do not believe I should have a particle of influence with her, either for or against the man she preferred."

"And you think Mr. Nasmyth is the man she prefers?"

"No, I have no reason to think so," said Mrs. Sinclair, speaking not without truth this time, and greatly relieved when Sir John took his departure.

He contrived, however, to have a few words with Miss Lisle before he left.

"Have I offended you past forgiveness, Miss Lisle?" he asked, in a low voice.

Miss Lisle looked up and looked down. Her eyes sparkled, but not, as it seemed, with anger.

"I think you did your best to offend me, Sir John," she said demurely.

“ But I am forgiven ? ”

She said nothing to this, but she held out her hand to him with another quick upward glance, which he interpreted as meaning that he was not out of favour. He went home with a somewhat lighter heart.

The following afternoon, just at sundown, he was passing through the pine plantation with the intention of calling again at Framleigh. Reginald had gone out with his mother, and Jan had spent the whole afternoon visiting some of his poorer neighbours, with whom he was even more popular than with his equals. Jan's ideas of social caste included merely a broad division into whites and blacks. All white people were in his eyes pretty much on a par, and the poorest of these day labourers were in this respect superior to him, that they had none of that coloured blood which was contamination to the white man. As to a baronet, Jan saw no particular distinction in that title, and his manner had no condescension or patronage in it; nothing could have made him understand why Sir John Fairbank should be in any way different from Jan Vermaak. Just as he reached the fence, and was about to vault over into the lane, he heard horses approaching, and paused a moment. Then he heard voices—a man's and a woman's; his brow darkened, and he stepped back among the trees, so that he could see without

being seen. In another minute the riders came into view ; they were walking their horses slowly, and deep in conversation. Jan's face grew darker still as he recognized Miss Lisle and Mr. Nasmyth.

He moved so that they should not see him as they passed, and he heard every word that they said. It seemed trivial talk enough. Mr. Nasmyth remarked on the beauty of the pines and larches in the plantation.

"Yes, they are among the prettiest of trees, I think," said Miss Lisle's gentle, lady-like tones. "They look beautiful under any aspect, but especially, I think, by moonlight."

"The nights are moonlight now," said Mr. Nasmyth, rather eagerly ; "shall we take a stroll in the plantation after dinner this evening ?"

"Mrs. Sinclair has some friends coming in this evening, I think," said Gertrude, gently.

"To-morrow evening, then ?"

They were already past, and though Jan strained his ears he could not catch Gertrude's reply. He turned back through the trees, and walked across the park towards home ; he would not call at Framleigh now.

If his thoughts were as dark as his countenance, Jan's reflections on the way home were not very pleasing. The next day would be Wednesday, and

Thursday was the day on which Miss Lisle had promised to give him her final answer. He felt much more doubt about that answer now than he had done a week ago.

As his feet brushed the long tufts of grass, numbers of rabbits started out and scattered in all directions. Jan stood still a minute and watched their little tails bobbing away with rapid jerks, north, south, east, and west. An idea seemed to occur to him, and a smile—not a pleasant one—crept over his stern face.

“It is not bad sport,” he said to himself as he walked on.

“Reginald,” he said to his cousin that evening, when they were sitting at dinner, “there are thousands of rabbits about in the park these fine evenings. Let us go and have a shot at them.”

“It would be a good thing to kill some of them,” observed Mrs. Carson, “for they do a great deal of mischief in the gardens.”

“All right,” said Reginald, “I’m your man. The moon is nearly full to-night, I think.”

They went out accordingly, and shot several rabbits. Jan was a splendid shot, and seldom missed his aim.

CHAPTER XXI.

It so happened that Gertrude and Mr. Nasmyth, in the course of their ride, encountered Mrs. Carson and her son, who were driving. After they had passed, Mrs. Carson asked who the gentleman was. Reginald told her.

“Miss Lisle is riding alone with him. They are intimate friends, I suppose?” she observed.

“I don’t think they have known each other very long,” said Reginald; “but Nasmyth is evidently desirous of being something more than an intimate friend.”

“Is that so?” said his mother. “Well, an engagement in that quarter would be rather a relief to us.”

Reginald thought to himself, “If Jan does not do something desperate;” but he said nothing, and presently Mrs. Carson continued—

“It seems to me that Jan has not been there so much lately.”

“He was there yesterday,” said Reginald, “with me.”

“And was Mr. Nasmyth there too?”

“Yes; he is staying in the house. John looked rather black over it.”

“Poor fellow!” sighed Mrs. Carson. “Still, it would be much the best thing if Gertrude married some one else.” She gave another sigh, remembering that she had once thought that Gertrude would make a charming wife for Reginald. She did not think so now.

As for Gertrude, she received a scolding the next morning from Mrs. Sinclair, who was rather uneasy about her *protégée’s* line of behaviour.

“I warned you, Gertrude,” she said, “that you were playing a dangerous game. Sir John thinks that you are trifling with him; and he is not a man to be trifled with, any one can see.”

“It is all right, Mrs. Sinclair,” said Gertrude, quietly; “I have made up my mind.”

She did not say, however, what her decision was; indeed, she hardly knew herself more than this. She had to give an answer to Sir John to-morrow; but she intended to try and bring Mr. Nasmyth to the point to-day; if she failed in doing so—well, then she would probably accept Sir John.

Mr. Nasmyth did not come to the point during the day, though it is fair to say that Gertrude gave him one or two opportunities. He reminded her, however, that

she had promised him a stroll in the plantation by moonlight, and she, with some show of bashful hesitation, consented.

Reginald was surprised that his cousin stayed away from Framleigh again for two days. He began to wonder whether Miss Lisle had definitely refused him, or whether he had really made up his mind to give her up. The latter seemed incredible, and Reginald, though he could hardly have told why, felt anxious and uneasy.

Jan stayed in the house nearly all day that Wednesday. He wrote a very long letter to the man who was in charge of his farm, together with some other writing. Mr. Bennett also came to see him on business, which occupied a good part of the morning. In the afternoon Jan sat out in the garden with his aunt, and told her a good deal about his father which he had never told her before, and which she had never ventured to ask him about, though often wishing to hear. He gave her descriptions of her brother's life in the colony, his work at the diamond fields, and also an account of his last illness and death. Mrs. Carson listened with intense, if melancholy, interest.

"I am so glad you have told me all this, John," she said when he had finished; "it is just what I have always wanted to know."

“Why did you not ask me, then, Aunt Alicia?” said Jan.

“Because I did not feel as if I knew you well enough,” she said, smiling at him; “but I do not feel that now.”

Reginald, who had joined them during the latter part of the conversation, observed his cousin’s particularly gentle, almost affectionate, manner, and wondered what was going on in his mind. Nothing, surely, of a very desperate nature. Reginald cheered himself with this thought, and put aside his ill-defined fears.

They dined together, as usual, at seven o’clock; and after dinner, Jan went outside. Reginald followed him a few minutes later, but did not find him. It was a lovely, calm, moonlight night, but rather cold. Reginald asked the servants if they had seen Sir John. At first it seemed that they had not; but one of the maids, hearing them asking one another, said that she had seen Sir John from a window, going across the garden in the direction of the park, carrying his gun.

When this was told to Reginald, all his uneasy fears returned in full force, though he could not have put them into a definite form. He said nothing to his mother, who only thought that he and Jan were strolling outside, as usual, but went quickly across the grounds to a side gate which opened into the park, and

took the direction of the lane leading past Framleigh—the direction, that is, of the pine plantation. He did not take his gun, but carried a stout walking-stick. The moon was almost full, and the shadows of the noble trees, dotted here and there in groups about the park, lay black and cold on the dewy turf. The mist rising in the distance, wrapped all the horizon in a silver haze, but overhead the sky was unfathomably clear. No stars were visible; the moon shed a flood of light over the wide, still expanse. Reginald, striding rapidly along with that nameless fear weighing on his breast, could not enjoy the exquisite beauty of the night. The moon, riding overhead so calm and so clear, seemed to him like a cold, dead eye, looking down indifferently on his trouble and his haste.

He drew near to the plantation. In some places the trees were planted thickly together, but here and there were open lanes and spaces, which were bright with moonlight. Reginald passed in among the trees, making for the little gate which opened into the lane opposite the gate of Framleigh. He had not gone many yards, however, before he was brought suddenly to a stop by a sight which sent a chill, colder than the night frost, through his veins—the sight which, all unknowing, he had come in such haste to see.

In a small open space between the trees, their figures

standing out clearly defined in the moonlight, were Miss Lisle and Mr. Nasmyth. His arm was round her waist, his hand clasped hers, her head drooped towards his breast; it was a typical picture of a pair of affianced lovers.

About five yards away from them, standing between the trees in deep shadow, was Jan, his gun raised to his shoulder, taking deliberate aim at the two figures full in his view. He was not a dozen paces from Reginald, when the latter came suddenly in sight of him.

It seemed to Reginald that horror chained his feet to the ground, yet in reality he did not pause for an instant. With a single bound he reached his cousin, and with the stick in his hand struck up the gun, which went off in the air, the bullet lodging in the trees. Jan uttered a deep curse, but stood still where he was. Miss Lisle screamed, ran a few steps, and fell down in a swoon. Mr. Nasmyth, after a scared glance around him, sprang after her, and lifted her up in his arms. At the same moment, a man coming along the lane, sprang over the fence, and rushed through the trees towards them; it was Mr. Bennett.

“For God’s sake, Mr. Carson!” he exclaimed, on perceiving Reginald, “what has happened?”

“Nothing, fortunately, Mr. Bennett,” replied Reginald, coolly. “Sir John’s gun went off unexpectedly, and he

might have had a bad accident; but the bullet has lodged in the top of a tree."

"But surely I heard some one scream," said Mr. Bennett.

"There was a woman in the lane," said Jan, stepping forward and speaking as quietly as his cousin, "who, like yourself, got a fright. I am very sorry to have startled you so, Mr. Bennett. I was out rabbit-shooting, and passing through the trees was careless enough to get my gun caught in some way in these lower boughs. However, there is no harm done."

"You are sure you are not hurt?" said Mr. Bennett, anxiously.

"Quite sure, thank you."

They all walked through the trees out into the open park. Reginald glanced at his cousin's face. It was rather pale and grave, but that was all that a casual observer would have been likely to notice. Reginald, however, saw, or fancied he saw, a dangerous gleam in the blue eyes such as he had seen there once before.

"Well, I am very glad there is no harm done," said Mr. Bennett, heartily. "And as it is so, and I am already late, I will get on home. Good night, Sir John; good night, Mr. Carson."

For one moment Reginald felt inclined to ask Mr. Bennett to walk back with them; but he did not do

it. If he had any influence with his cousin at all, it was to-night that he must use it to bring him, if possible, to a better mind; and whatever risk he might run by walking alone through the park at night with a desperate man whom he had just thwarted, and who was twice as strong as himself, it was better to run that risk than that Jan should think him a coward, and despise him. So he returned Mr. Bennett's good night, and then, putting his arm through his cousin's, he said very quietly, but with extreme firmness—

“Come, John, we must be getting home too. Mother will be wondering what has become of us.”

Jan turned round without a word, and they walked together across the dewy grass, beneath the cold bright moon, still looking down on them, unmoved by all that moved them. Not a single word passed between them; but once or twice a heavy sigh escaped from Jan.

After the first moment Reginald felt no fear. The consciousness of his own superior moral strength made him indifferent to the superior physical strength of the would-be murderer with whom he walked arm-in-arm. He felt instinctively that Jan was cowed by him, and dared not turn upon him. Yet it was a terrible and a memorable walk through the cold, bright night, with the shadows lying at their feet of the great solemn, peaceful trees, which never stirred a leaf as they passed.

What was passing in his cousin's mind Reginald could not guess. He himself was recalling every detail of the scene he had just passed through, and was trying to collect his thoughts and prepare the words with which he should plead with Jan that night. One thing only was clear to his mind—that this affair, or at least the truth of it, should never be known to his mother.

They reached the house, and went in. Mrs. Carson, hearing their footsteps, came to the drawing-room door.

“Why, what have you two boys been doing with yourselves?” she said. “I thought you were never coming in!”

“We went for a stroll in the park, Aunt Alicia,” said Jan. “It is a beautiful night.”

CHAPTER XXII.

It was nearly eleven o'clock that night when Reginald went to his cousin's room. He waited until his mother had been in hers for some time, and then he went quietly to Jan's door and knocked. Jan's voice said, "Come in!" in his usual tone, and Reginald entered.

Jan had doffed his evening attire, and had on a loose jacket that he had been in the habit of wearing on the farm. In spite of the sharpness of the night air, his window was wide open; he was sitting beside it, leaning on the window-ledge and smoking. He did not move when Reginald came in, and the latter, drawing up a chair, sat down opposite to him.

"John," he said quietly, "I have come to ask you if you will do something to please me?"

Jan removed his pipe from his mouth, and looked at his cousin with a little surprise.

"Well?" he said.

"Will you go away with me for a little while and travel about—see something of England—and not

come back here until Miss Lisle is gone away or married?"

Reginald knew that he was touching an open sore; but he did it unflinchingly, believing it to be best.

Jan winced a little, but he showed no anger. "You need not worry yourself," he said gloomily. "I do not want to marry Miss Lisle now."

"Are you sure of that?" said Reginald. "You feel mad with her now; but if you remain here, and continue to see her, you will not be able to become suddenly indifferent to her. I suppose that she is engaged to Mr. Nasmyth now. You will see them together, and your passions, which are your masters, will hurry you into some fresh attempt at violence against a man who, after all, has only done what he has a perfect right to do."

Jan's eyes gleamed for a moment when Reginald said so coolly that his passions were his masters; but he still restrained himself, and answered quietly—

"Who? Nasmyth? I did not mean to shoot *him*. He is not to blame. He has no idea that I wanted to marry Gertrude. She is fooling him as she fooled me!"

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Reginald, aghast, "that you meant to shoot——"

"Miss Lisle? Yes, of course I did. It is she that has played me false, the cursed little she-devil!"

"Was she promised to you?" asked Reginald, struggling with his feelings of horror and repugnance.

"No; she dilly-dallied, and put me off, just to humbug me," said Jan, fiercely, "until she made sure of the other man, I suppose. She gave me every reason to believe that she would marry me in the end—every reason."

"She is just a selfish, heartless flirt," said Reginald. "I thought so from the first. But, Jan," he continued earnestly, "how can you—how *can* you—think so lightly of taking away life? You, who have no power to give it?"

"To take away life," said Jan, unmoved, "is not half so bad as to spoil and ruin and make life miserable! How can a girl think so lightly of that?"

"I agree with you," said Reginald, still searching for the channel by which his words might appeal to his cousin. "But do you mean to tell me, John, that a shallow, trifling girl like Gertrude Lisle has power to ruin your life and make it miserable? Only for a short time, surely."

"I have told you before, Reginald," said Jan, provoked this time, "that you do not know what desire means."

"Yes; but you are wrong," said Reginald, quietly. "There is no man living who does not know what

desire means. But I do not know, and do not wish to know, what it is to be the slave of every desire, to have to debase myself to the level of a wild beast, because I have no power to govern my desires."

Jan said nothing to this, and Reginald went on, still feeling in the dark—

"Have you never thought, John," he said sorrowfully, "what a pity it is that a man who might be so strong should be in reality so miserably weak? You are in a responsible position—you have several people under you. How can you control others if you cannot control yourself? You have influence over many more. Why should it be a bad influence? I am sure you could make it a good one if you liked. Jan, I can't *bear* to see you throwing yourself away like this. You could be something so much better than a mere sensual, beastly criminal. Suppose you had succeeded to-night—what would have come of it? Nothing but the momentary gratification of your revenge, and no end of other miserable consequences to several innocent people who have never done you any harm."

"Nasmyth would have been well rid of her," said Jan, callously.

"Perhaps. But it is not your business to arrange Mr. Nasmyth's life, or Miss Lisle's either. You would do better to arrange your own a little more sensibly."

Reginald was growing indignant at Jan's apparently brutal indifference. He thought that none of his words had made any impression on his cousin, and that perhaps anger would be more effectual than entreaty. Jan's callousness, however, was to a great extent assumed; he was, in reality, deeply impressed, not so much by what his cousin said, as by himself, his pluck and coolness, his force of character.

He sat up in his chair, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and closed the window.

"Reginald," he said, suddenly changing the subject, "I could easily have killed you this evening, when we were walking home together, if I had liked."

"But you did not like," said Reginald, quietly. "What would you have gained by killing me?"

"Nothing, of course; but I was almost mad enough with you to do it."

"But not quite," said Reginald.

"You did not know that I should not do it."

"I did not think you would."

"But you thought of the possibility."

"Yes, I did that, John."

"I am much stronger than you are."

"Undoubtedly."

Jan turned in his chair and looked steadily at his cousin.

“You are the bravest man I know, Reginald,” he said. “I am brave myself, but you are braver. If you had been in my place, and I in yours, I should not have done as you did.”

“I do not see what else you could have done,” said Reginald.

“Do you remember,” said Jan, after a pause, during which his thoughts appeared to wander off on another track—“do you remember, when we first came here, asking me one day to try and leave off swearing?”

“Yes,” said Reginald; “I knew that mother would never stay in the same house with you unless you did; and that white servants, besides, would not stand it.”

“Have you heard me swear since?” asked Jan.

“No, I have not,” said Reginald—“at least, not more than once or twice.”

“I had rather hard work to remember,” said Jan.

“I am sure you must have had; and I have always felt very grateful to you for it.”

“Well,” said Jan, “what I was going to say was this: I did not leave off swearing because I see any harm in it myself—I don’t. I left it off because you asked me, and for no other reason.”

“For whatever reason,” said Reginald, “I am very glad you did it. Will you, for the same reason, do what I asked you at the beginning of this conversation?”

“Go away with you?” said Jan, slowly. “I don’t know, Reginald. I will think about it, and tell you to-morrow.”

Reginald, satisfied to have gained so much, was about to leave him, thinking it useless to say any more to him at present. But just as he was going to rise from his chair, Jan turned suddenly towards him again, and said abruptly—

“When was it that Gertrude told Aunt Alicia of her former engagement to me?”

“It was when she stayed here, soon after her return to England,” replied Reginald.

“Did she stay here? I never knew it.”

“Yes. My mother knows Lady Duncan, with whom Miss Lisle was living at the time. Lady Duncan was ill, and Miss Lisle was knocked up with nursing her, so mother brought her down here for rest and change.”

“I had no idea of it,” said Jan, evidently much surprised. “I thought when she came to the Sinclairs that it was your first acquaintance with her.”

“It was mine, of course,” said Reginald. “I was in South Africa when she stayed here with mother.”

“And she told Aunt Alicia about our engagement then?”

“Yes.”

“And when did you hear about it?”

“Mother wrote and told me the story. She was very much taken up with Miss Lisle at that time.”

Jan looked at him with growing astonishment. “Was that before or after you knew me?” he asked sharply.

“It was when I was laid up in your house.”

“And did you know I was the same man?”

“I thought it most probable.”

“It was before you found out I was your cousin?”

“Yes.”

“Then,” said Jan, who was rapidly taking in a number of new ideas, “you knew before I told you that my mother was a Kafir?”

“I was almost sure of it—yes.”

“And you told me who I was, all the same?”

“Of course I did.”

“You might easily have kept it from me. It would never have been found out.”

“Perhaps not; but that would not have been right. I should have found myself out, and should have felt mean all the rest of my life.”

Jan sat looking at him, his brows drawn together with thought, his face working with excitement. Reginald dreaded the next question, but he was resolved to answer straightforwardly.

“Did she tell all about that spying little Dutchman?” said Jan, suddenly.

"Yes," said Reginald. His voice altered a little, in spite of his strong efforts at self-command, and Jan observed it at once.

"How much do you know?" he said very quietly and steadily.

"I know everything there is to know," replied Reginald as quietly.

"You have known it ever since you were laid up in my house?"

"Yes."

There was dead silence for a few minutes. Then—

"You knew that I murdered Van der Riet?" said Jan.

"I guessed it."

"You could have proved it?"

"I believe so."

"Yet you did not give me up?"

"No. At first I was laid up, and afterwards I found out who you were."

"Will you give me up to justice now?"

"No, John; I shall never give you up now."

"You knew all along that I was half a Kafir, and also that I was a murderer? You found out that I was your cousin, and heir to your property, and you told me, and told it to the world, and gave me my rights?"

"Yes, John. I will tell you frankly that I had

many doubts and misgivings; but I decided finally that that was my proper course."

"And you have not repented?"

"I shall not, John, if you will only try and pull yourself together, and do what is right now."

"Reginald," said Jan, leaning forward and taking Reginald's hand in his, "I told you just now that you were the bravest man I know. You are also the best. I never thought there were any good men till I knew you. I thought they all humbugged one another, and did the best they could for themselves. I am not a good man, and I never shall be; but you have made me believe in goodness."

"Why should you say you never will be?" asked Reginald. "Any man who knows what goodness is has power to attain to it."

"You think so," said Jan, "because you have attained it. Now, if I were to do what you think right, I should give myself up to justice."

Reginald was silent.

"Is not that what you would do in my place?"

"Yes, it is."

"And you would bring disgrace on all your family?"

"That was done when the deed was committed," replied Reginald.

Jan had evidently not expected this answer. He moved a little uneasily, and then said—

“But I mean public disgrace.”

“I should have to do it, John, simply because I could not endure the tortures of remorse.”

“Remorse!” said Jan. “I feel remorse now for what I have unwittingly made you suffer, because I love and admire you, Reginald; but I feel no remorse for having strangled that little reptile, and never shall.”

Reginald sighed. Say what he might, he never seemed to get any further with this strange cousin of his, who had so much of the primeval savage in his nature, that the very foundations of morality seemed altogether wanting in him.

“What about Van der Riet’s parents and his family?” he asked. “You had no quarrel with them, yet they had to suffer for your deed.”

“I never thought about them at all,” answered Jan. “I don’t know anything about them, except that his father is a magistrate. I only met Herman Van der Riet in the way of business, and I dished him nicely about Bosman’s Kloof. Look here, Reginald, I should like to make a clean breast of it to you, and tell you all about it and how I did it.”

“Do so, if you wish, John,” said Reginald, though

he shrank from hearing the details of an event which he would gladly have forgotten altogether, if possible. "Do so, if you wish it. I will listen to whatever you like to tell me."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JAN leaned back in his chair again, and crossed his legs. "I was working on an ostrich farm," he began, "a little way up the line, with a fellow named Sargent. I didn't get on with him, and made up my mind to buy a farm of my own as soon as my contract with him was up. One day Van der Riet came there to buy feathers. That was the first time I saw him. I saw then that he was a little sneak, and he was a coward too—funked all the birds, even the tamest old hens and the half-grown chicks. Said an ostrich had kicked him once, and he had never got over it. I have been kicked too, but it was the bird that didn't get over it."

"But if you injured the bird, you must have had to pay for it," observed Reginald.

"It was my own bird, and the loss was mine. I didn't care, so long as I punished the brute for breaking my ribs. But about Van der Riet. I did not see him again till after I left Sargent and went back to Port Elizabeth, where he lived. His father is a magistrate

there—I think I told you. I met him in a canteen one evening. He was drunk—not badly, but enough to make him quarrelsome. I don't know why fellows get drunk. I have tried it, but it is not nice, and you feel so doubled up the next day. The farm, Bosman's Kloef, was advertised to be sold by auction in three days' time, and I was determined to have it, even if I gave a little more than its value. Van der Riet was saying in the canteen that night that he meant to have it; in fact, he talked as if it was his already. That put my back up, and I told him that I meant to have a very good try for it too. He swore to me that whatever I bid, he would outbid me. I knew that he had lots of money to pitch away—more than I had.—and I was afraid he would keep his word. I knew the man who was offering the farm for sale, and I went off to him the next day and offered him all I had for it. At first he wouldn't do it, but afterwards he closed with me. I dare say he would have got more if Van der Riet and I had bid for it; but of course I didn't let on about that. Well, I got the farm, and of course Van der Riet was mad, and said he'd pay me out. I didn't suppose he would have the chance; but, as it happened, he did."

Jan paused, and his face grew dark as he recalled what followed.

Reginald was painfully interested. "How did he find out that you were engaged to Miss Lisle?" he asked.

"He met us walking together one day. He knew that I didn't know any girls, and never went out with them, and so he jumped to the conclusion that we were engaged. Then he waited till I was out of the way, and went to her behind my back and sneaked."

"How did you know it?" asked Reginald.

"I believe I should have guessed it, anyway; but, as it happened, I came back sooner than I expected. I meant to be in the Bay on the night of the 28th, and to go on board with Gertrude on the morning of the 29th. I got away on the 27th, however, and went as far as Uitenhage on business. Uitenhage is only an hour by rail from Port Elizabeth, as I dare say you know, and I went in pretty early on the morning of the 28th. I went home first, and then I was going to the hotel to see Gertrude. I came up by a side street, and saw Gertrude, Mr. Sinclair, and Van der Riet, walking away from the hotel together. I followed them at a distance, and saw where they went. Then I knew it was all up directly. If I had been ten minutes sooner, the sly little ape would never have got to see Gertrude; but once he had seen her, it was too late for me to do anything. I don't know how it was

I did not polish him off then and there, while he was waiting for them round the corner, and they were poking all sorts of questions at mother. I had to hold myself in pretty tight. You say I can't govern myself; but I did that morning, anyhow. I thought I could enjoy my revenge better if I got him alone, and frightened him well before I killed him. All the rest of that day I shadowed Van der Riet; but I didn't get a chance at him, he was among too many people. I did not go near Gertrude, because I knew it was useless; and, besides, I cared more for my revenge than for anything else just then—even for her.

“The next morning I saw Van der Riet go to the station. I followed him, and found that he had taken a ticket for Good Hope. He knew I should be in Port Elizabeth that day, and thought to be out of the way. He was in an awful funk, and I was delighted to think what miseries he was going through. He would have been safer if he had stayed among his own people. Not that I should have let him escape in the end, anyway.

“Well, I walked to Good Hope along the shore, and never met a soul, except a couple of niggers. I saw that Van der Riet had gone to the hotel, and I lay low among the sand-hills all day. It was tremendously hot; no one stirred out that could help it. I never saw a living creature the whole day. Good Hope

is an awfully lonely place—I suppose you don't know it?"

"Yes, I have stayed there," said Reginald.

"Do you know those two empty cottages, just before you cross the main road, going to the siding?"

"Yes," said Reginald, with a shudder.

"Well, it was there I caught my gentleman. He came down to the siding alone, luckily for me. I just stepped out in front of him, and you should have seen the colour he went—he was like a corpse already. 'Now, you make a sound, and you are a dead man,' I said, showing him my revolver; but I never meant to shoot him, because of the noise, and, besides, it was much too easy a death for him.

"I made him come with me to one of those empty cottages, where I had seen a window unfastened. He went, shaking all over like an aspen leaf. I enjoyed those moments, for then I really tasted my revenge. I opened the window and made him get through, with my revolver at the back of his neck, and I got through after him. Then I taxed him with his mean conduct, and made him confess everything, and made him beg for mercy, and watched his face while I told him I would show him the same mercy he had shown to me.

"Then I heard the train coming, and I saw that he was going to scream, just for a last chance; and I

caught him by the throat and choked his worthless life out of him—not too quickly, but slowly enough to give him a good taste of the bitterness of death. Then I laid him down, and got out of the window again, and closed it. I walked back through the sand-hills and along the shore, and met no one. Suspicion never even came near me,” he concluded, with a grim laugh.

He sat while telling this with his eyes gazing as if on some far-distant scene, which he recalled with delight.

Reginald felt sick with horror. “Jan, Jan,” he said hopelessly, “how can you be so brutal? Were you made to be nothing but a tiger or a wolf? Can’t you understand why such cold-blooded murder is regarded with abhorrence by every right-minded man? Are you really so without human feeling? I cannot believe it.”

Jan looked at his cousin, and his face gradually changed and softened.

“I understand why *you* regard it with abhorrence,” he said. “And believe me, if I had known what was to come—if I had had the slightest idea that some day my deed would affect you—and if I had known you then, I should not have done it.”

“Yes, you would,” said Reginald, bitterly. “Your

desire for revenge would have been much stronger than any possible consideration for me.”

“No,” said Jan, “it would not. You do not know how much I think of you, Reginald, or how much I would do for you.”

“I know just how much you think of me,” said Reginald, in the same tone. “All I could say could not hold you back from trying to commit a similar crime this evening. You will not do one thing for me that is really hard to you to do.”

His words went home at last. Jan’s face clouded, not with anger, but with real sorrow. He was silent for some time. At last he spoke in a low voice, but with a tone of great decision.

“You shall not say that of me again,” he said. “I will yet do something for you that you shall acknowledge was hard for me to do.”

Reginald did not understand him; but yet again, in spite of all that horrified and repelled him in this man, he felt that there was something in him that drew him towards him, in spite of himself. Perhaps it was only the tie of blood, perhaps it was the idea that he always clung to—that somewhere in this savage nature there was a vein of real goodness, hidden under the hard, rocky masses of brutal inhumanity.

There was another long silence, and then Reginald

rose from his chair. Jan rose too, but put out a hand to detain his cousin.

"Tell me," he said, "how you knew of Van der Riet's death—from the papers?"

"I found his body myself," said Reginald, quietly.

Jan looked at him in utter astonishment. "You were at Good Hope that day!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and I went to the station on the morning of the 30th of January. Miss Robertson was with me too, and we looked, quite by chance, in at the window of that empty cottage."

Reginald stopped abruptly as the events of that morning, bringing with them a keen recollection of May, crowded painfully upon his memory.

Jan suddenly caught hold of both his cousin's hands, and held them in a vehement grasp.

"Reginald," he said, in a voice of deep emotion, "I know I am a brute, and I know you think me one—it cannot be otherwise. But believe me, *believe* me when I say I love you above every other human being; and I will yet prove it to you, so that I shall *make* you believe it. Promise me one thing before you go—that when that day comes, and I shall have made expiation to you for all that I have made you suffer, you will then forgive me."

The blue eyes were full of tears, that had looked

unmoved upon the agonies of his writhing victim. Reginald was deeply touched, but he remained very calm.

“I forgive you now, Jan,” he said gently, “if that is all you want. I hope you will yet learn to want something better than my forgiveness. And now, my dear fellow, try and get some sleep, and to-morrow morning we will talk things over quietly. Good night.”

He drew his hands gently from his cousin's powerful grasp, when, to his astonishment, Jan suddenly flung his arms around him and embraced him, with a deep, sighing sob. Then as suddenly he released him, and turned away.

As Reginald went to his room the hall clock struck two.

The next morning Jan was gone. No trace of him could be found; no one had seen him leave the house, or knew at what time he had gone out. He had, however, left a little note on the library table addressed to Reginald. It contained these words—

“DEAR REGINALD,

“Do not hunt for me. I have returned to Bosman's Kloof, whence you shall hear of me in due time.

“JAN.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was summer once again—glaring, burning summer—on the wide dusty flats and stony kopjes of the South African karoo. All through the long bright November days the veldt lay baking in the unveiled sunshine; beds of wild yellow marguerites glorified every little hollow and sloet, holding up their smiling faces to the sun, in whose direct beams alone they uncloset their golden petals; the pale green karoo bush, of which the bitter, wholesome scent is at once observable by one who enters the district after an absence of any length, had grown up tall and vigorous after recent rains, mingled with the bright grass green and reddish brown of the salt, juicy ganna, and the somewhat darker shade of the mimosa thorn; on the bare, ungrown spaces of sand the white salt lay encrusted on the surface of the ground; while from the masses of grey stone and white spar a thousand points of mica flashed, like little mimic diamonds in the rays of the sun.

Dear, familiar, and home-like was this wild and barren scene to one who walked on foot, upright and vigorous in the scorching heat, over the loose stones, prickly bush, and burning sand, towards the banks of the broad river, whose bed lay dry and bare, except where here and there the water still lay in deep holes, but whose banks were densely clothed with almost impenetrable bush and undergrowth. On reaching this belt of thorns, the wayfarer penetrated by a narrow cattle-track into its midst, often stooping his tall head beneath the low boughs of the thorn-trees, or beating them aside with the stick he carried in his hand. He arrived at last on the steep, sandy bank of the river, just above one of the deep water-holes before mentioned; and, after a glance up and down to make sure that he was alone, he stripped himself and plunged into the water, as fine and well-proportioned a specimen of healthy young manhood as could anywhere be seen.

After swimming and diving for the best part of half an hour, he came out again, and, when he was dressed, chose a shady place among the thorns, out of sight of any path, where he lay down and slept soundly, like a man who has been up all night.

The afternoon crept on, the sun sank towards the barren mountains, whose rugged outline cut the western sky; but as yet no breath of coolness freshened the hot,

languid air, and the sleeper still slept on, undisturbed by any living thing. At length, however, he was awakened by the rustling of bushes, the snapping of twigs, and a sound as of multitudes of pattering little feet. It was a herd of goats coming down to drink before going home for the night. The sleeper sat up and looked around him in a somewhat dazed manner, as if he could not quite remember where he was. Perhaps in his dreams he had been far away. A little white kid, having drunk its fill, came wandering through the bushes, and, suddenly seeing him, stood stock still, gazing at him with unquenchable curiosity. The traveller returned its gaze, with a smile on his face, as if contemplating some pleasantly familiar object. Then, afraid that the little creature might get separated from the rest of the herd, he rose slowly to his feet and drove it away into the bushes again.

When the goats were gone and all was quiet as before, he began to push his way out through the thorns, but was presently arrested by the sound of voices. He concealed himself again, but caught a glimpse of some Kafirs coming down to fetch water. They had made themselves a regular footpath, and came one behind the other in a long procession; first, three women, with buckets on their heads, their lithe, swaying brown figures stripped to the waist, from

which a shawl, twisted round the body, hung nearly to the feet. One of them carried a baby on her back, twisted into the shawl, its little brown face, with a crown of fine black wool, peering out like some half-human little ape from the folds of the shawl. After the women came the children—two girls with a single, scanty garment, also with buckets on their heads, and two little boys, absolutely unadorned, save for a string of beads round the waist, swinging small buckets in their hands.

The traveller looked, and smiled again. It seemed almost as if he knew these Kafirs, yet he did not show himself. He waited till they had fetched their water, which, with playing and talking and sitting down to rest, took them quite half an hour; he waited until they had filed back through the thorn-bushes, and the sound of their chatter and laughter had died quite away on the still evening air, and then he made his own way out into the open veldt.

It was already almost night. The sun had disappeared behind the mountains, which were now of a dull, cold grey, with wisps and wreaths of mist clinging to their massive shoulders. The stars came out, twinkling dimly at first through the fading daylight, but growing brighter each minute as the sky became of a deeper and more translucent purple. The veldt

gave out its bitter, pungent odour as the feet of the traveller crushed the smaller plants in his progress. He followed no path, but appeared to know his way perfectly, guiding himself by the highest point of the mountain chain, which still stood up distinct and dark against the starlit sky.

He walked on steadily for more than an hour. Twice he stepped quickly aside to avoid a journeying snake, and turned round as quickly to smite it dead with his stick. Once he paused to watch a dark, bristling lump, that dived away at the sound of his footsteps with hair literally on end—it was a large porcupine. More than once he heard the strange jarring cry of the night-hawk pursuing its prey. All these sights and sounds were familiar to him too; he had spent many a silent, starry summer night out in the karoo.

At last he came to a wire fence, and climbed through it. The moon was rising now; she was past the full, but still gave plenty of light. The traveller came to a waggon-road, but he did not follow it, he only crossed it and went on. Presently the dark outlines of some low buildings came in view; he knew them well—they were the outlines of his home. There were the stable and the cart-shed, the shear-house, and, further away, the servants' huts. There was the slanting roof of the homestead, the projecting corner where the new room

had been built, the broad stoep in front of the door. The light was still burning in the front room, so the inmates were not yet gone to bed; the traveller drew near to the house, silently, stealthily, until he was by the window of the newly-built bedroom. The moonlight entered at the window and flooded the little room, so that he could see every corner of it distinctly. It was not altered. The bed stood in the same corner; the couch, brought in from the front room, had been left in its old place across the window; the little table, with the lamp on it, was pushed back against the bare wall; the cupboard door, that was warped, stood open half an inch, as it always did. Only there was a strange coat hanging on the peg behind the door, and a coloured patchwork quilt on the bed, that used not to be there; that was all. Otherwise, all was the same as when Reginald Carson lay on the couch with a broken leg, and Jan Vermaak entertained him and waited on him.

And Jan Vermaak, *alias* John Fairbank, who came thus, like a thief in the night, to visit his own house, drew a heavy, heavy sigh, and brushed a most unaccustomed moisture from his eyes. This place had only been his home for a few months—scarcely a year—but with it were bound up associations and incidents that had more powerfully influenced his life than any others, although at the time he had not known it. In that

room he had learned to know the only white man whom he loved, and who loved him; the only man who had shown him what real manhood is, and had made him admire and care for what is good and right; to this man he had bidden farewell. For this reason this place was dear to him; and he, who loved not another foot of earth in all the world, clung to this spot as a man clings to his childhood's first and happiest home.

He rode all night, and, with intervals of rest, the following day; the next night he was back in Port Elizabeth. He did not go to his mother's house, but put up at a quiet hotel.

After a few hours' rest, he arose and dressed himself with some care. He was somewhat burnt from the sea voyage and his expedition into the karoo, and there were some new lines of thought on his broad, square brow. He looked at himself in the glass, a thing he rarely did, and a curious, rather bitter smile curved his lips. He thought of a handsome young tiger, full of life and vigour, that he had once battled with in a kloof among the mountains; the animal had sprung upon him, and he had required all his strength and dexterity to escape being seriously injured. After a short, sharp struggle, he had succeeded in putting a bullet through the creature's head. In a moment all that splendid vitality, that lithe activity, that cruel

strength, were crushed and destroyed ; only a handsome, lifeless body lay at his feet. He almost felt sorrow when he looked at the beautiful beast—one moment the very incarnation of buoyant animal life, the next moment nothing but a senseless, lumpish corpse. It seemed so quickly, so easily done ; it could never be undone. He remembered it distinctly now ; and with the recollection came to him another, much more recent—the recollection of Reginald's words to him on the night that he had tried to shoot Gertrude Lisle : “How can you think so lightly of taking away life ? You, who have no power to give it ?”

He sighed again heavily as he called up the earnest face, the vibrating tones of the voice. Then he turned away from the glass, went out of the room, and downstairs, out into the street.

It was still early, but the streets were all astir with life. Business begins early in South African towns, and all the stores and offices had long been open. Jan went down the hill into the main street, and walked along, scanning the houses, till he came to one with a brass plate and a row of names on it. On the second floor, according to this plate, were the offices of Messrs. Arkwright and Damer, solicitors ; and it was to their door that Jan betook himself. He was admitted, and remained inside for a considerable time ; when he came

out, his face wore a look of grave satisfaction, mingled with sadness, as if he had arrived at some decision that he felt to be right, yet which gave him pain.

He walked straight through the streets now, towards the North End, never pausing for a minute until he reached his mother's cottage. The door stood wide open, and he entered without knocking.

Nampetu was standing in front of a large tin bath set on a bench, engaged in washing some clothes. Her beautifully formed arms were bare almost to the shoulder, and her well-shaped, muscular hands washed and wrung out the clothes with easy strength. As Jan's shadow fell across the threshold, she turned, and, on seeing him there, uttered a loud exclamation in Kafir.

"Jan, my son!" she said, in the same language; "you have come back from England?"

"Yes, mother, I have come back," said Jan, speaking Kafir also, and greeting her affectionately. "I wished to see my home and my people again."

"And your English cousin—is he with you?" she asked, gazing at him all the time with pride and joy.

"No, I am alone," said Jan.

"You do not like England?"

"Yes, I like England, but I like Africa better," he replied with a laugh; and then Gesina came into the

room, and showed equal surprise and delight at seeing her brother again so unexpectedly. Jan had always been good to his family, and they were much attached to him.

The children were all at home, only playing outside in the streets, and they were soon recalled. The younger ones were quite shy at first, seeming to think that the transformation of their brother into an English lord would remove him to some unattainable distance ; but they soon found, to their joy, that he was quite unaltered—nay, more, that he was affectionate and caressing to a degree he had never been before with them.

He remained there all the morning, talking to his mother, playing with the little girls, and answering their innumerable questions about England. There was not much that he could make them understand about English life and ways ; but he described the look of the country, the ways of working, the houses, and also the voyage and the life on board ship, so as to entertain and astonish them greatly.

Afterwards he turned to his brother Mbangwe, and told him that in time to come he should want him to look after his farm of Bosman's Kloof for him, as soon as he was old enough.

“I do not mean to live there again myself,” he said ;

and he gave Mbangwe various instructions, which he bade him remember particularly.

He had dinner with them all in the middle of the day, reflecting on the difference between this sort of picnicking with mealies and sour milk, and the formal dinners to which he had sat down every day, in correct evening dress, with his aunt and cousin. He could hardly believe he was the same man; and, indeed, in some respects he was not.

“And now,” he said, the unceremonious meal being over, “I must leave you.”

The children clung round him, and laughingly tried to hold him, that he should not go. He laughed with them, but gently disengaged himself from them at the same time. Then he took an affectionate leave of his mother.

“When shall we see you again, my son?” she asked rather wistfully. She did not expect him to come and stay there.

“I cannot say, mother,” he replied very quietly; “but you need not fret about me.”

“I do not fret now you are here,” she replied; “I did when you were in England and on the sea.”

He said good-bye to them all, and then lingered a little, as if he found it hard to go. The children still hung about him, glad to detain him, if only for a few

minutes. When he did go at last, he went suddenly and very quickly, passing through the door with one more hasty farewell, and walking away with long strides up the hot dusty street; he did not look back again.

CHAPTER XXV.

JAN went back to his hotel, where he asked for pen, ink, and paper; he shut himself into his room, and wrote for some time. When he came out again, it was three o'clock by a large clock which stood in the hall. He stood for a few seconds gazing at it with a grave, set face. To-morrow morning, now, when that clock should next strike three. . . . The proprietor of the hotel crossed the hall, and Jan turned suddenly round and addressed him.

"Where does Mr. Van der Riet, the magistrate, have his office?" he asked.

"At the Court House, sir—you know the building?"

Jan nodded.

"His private residence is on the Reserve," continued the proprietor.

"Can you tell me if he has a son living?"

"Yes, one, sir—a young gentleman about nineteen or twenty; he is a clerk in his father's office. Mr. Van der Riet lost his eldest son in a very sad way—perhaps you heard of it, sir?"

“Yes, I know about that,” said Jan, quickly. “I suppose I should find him at his office now?”

“Most likely, sir. If not, any one will direct you to his private residence.”

“Thank you,” said Jan. “Good afternoon.”

He looked back at the man as he went out, and the landlord remembered that look afterwards; at the time he was momentarily struck by it, but forgot it again.

Jan walked down the hill with a firm, steady stride, which never faltered till he came to a pause before the Court House. He ascended the steps, and asked a porter to direct him to Mr. Van der Riet’s office.

“Mr. Van der Riet is engaged at this moment, sir,” said the porter.

“I will wait,” said Jan. That gave him so much time longer—perhaps ten minutes.

He sat down on a bench in the corridor near Mr. Van der Riet’s door. Presently a young fellow came along the corridor with some papers in his hand, and glanced at Jan as he passed. He was short, stout, and smooth-faced, with a very long upper lip and elevated eyebrows. Jan, looking at him, knew that it must be young Van der Riet, from his likeness to his brother. The lad went into his father’s office; as he opened the door Jan heard the sound of voices, first a man speaking and

then a woman, in Dutch. The door was closed again, and the sound was instantly quenched.

“No one outside will hear what I say,” thought Jan.

He waited a few minutes more ; the time did not seem at all long. Then the magistrate’s door opened again, and two women came out — a white woman and a coloured—and the porter went in, and Jan heard voices again. Then the porter came out again, and coming up to Jan, said—

“Mr. Van der Riet is at liberty now, sir ; shall I give your name ? ”

“It is not necessary,” said Jan, rising.

The porter showed him into the magistrate’s room, and went out, closing the door behind him. The sound of that closing door seemed to strike on Jan’s heart like a pistol-shot. It was as if the door of a tomb had closed on him.

The room was large and light. There was one window, opposite the door, looking into the courtyard. The walls were painted light green, and were bare, except for a large map of South Africa which hung on the right-hand side. In the middle of the room, between the window and the door, stood the writing-table. This, with a couple of chairs and a small stove, formed the sole furniture of the room.

The magistrate sat in front of the writing-table on

a revolving library chair, in which he turned himself towards Jan as he entered. He was a stout, pleasant-looking man, with thin brown hair and a closely-cut beard and moustache. His son, whom Jan had seen in the corridor, was seated on the other side of the table, under the large map. He rose and placed a chair for Jan opposite to the magistrate, and was then about to leave the room, but Jan put out a hand to detain him.

“You will oblige me very much by remaining,” he said courteously. “I should like you to be a witness to what I have to communicate.”

The lad hesitated and looked at his father, who just nodded his head, whereupon the son resumed his seat.

“Whom have I the honour of addressing?” asked the magistrate, speaking very good English, but with a slight accent.

“My name is Sir John Fairbank,” replied Jan; “but I lived here for some years under the name of Jan Vermaak.”

“Ah! I remember to have heard something of the story,” said the magistrate with interest. “Your father also called himself Jan Vermaak—was it not so?”

“Yes,” said Jan; “and I was discovered, and my real title revealed to me by my cousin, Mr. Carson,

through a somewhat strange series of events which I need not relate now; unless you are not satisfied as to my identity?" he added, producing one of his cards, which he laid on the magistrate's desk.

Mr. Van der Riet glanced at it. "Oh, that is all right, Sir John," he said; "and what is your business with me to-day?"

"I have come," said Jan, "to make a deposition."

Mr. Van der Riet drew a sheet of foolscap towards him, and took up a pen.

"Of what nature?" he asked.

"Concerning the murder of your son, Hermann Van der Riet, in January last," replied Jan, quietly.

The magistrate started violently, and the pen dropped from his fingers. The smooth, round face of his son grew deadly pale; both men stared at Jan with wide open eyes.

"Do you mean to say," asked the magistrate, with a trembling voice, "that you can tell me who committed that dastardly crime?"

"I did it," said Jan, "myself."

The grave blue eyes, full of determined purpose, looked steadily into the terrified grey eyes of the magistrate; young Van der Riet made an inarticulate sound in his throat. There was a minute of awful silence, while the three men stared at each other.

“Try and compose yourself, Mr. Van der Riet,” said Jan, who was quite collected. “It is true that I murdered your son; but I have come, as you see, of my own accord, to give myself up to justice; and I should like to relate to you the motive of my crime, and the manner in which I carried it out, if you will take down what I say.”

The magistrate made a violent effort to recover himself. A jug of water and a tumbler stood on the table; he poured himself out a glass of water with a shaking hand, and drank it off; then he took up the pen once more.

“Proceed, Sir John,” he said, in a low tone.

Jan commenced his story, in a perfectly steady voice, from the time when he bought the farm of Bosman’s Kloof. This circumstance was evidently known to the magistrate, who remembered his son’s anger at losing the place which he had hoped to purchase; but all that followed was quite new to him, and he received it not only with astonishment, but even with incredulity. Jan noted this with satisfaction.

When he came to give the actual account of the murder, he made it brief. The two faces before him moved him to compassion, and he could not now gloat over the details of his revenge as he had done when relating it to Reginald. When he had finished, he added—

“I have already made this confession, verbally, to my cousin, Mr. Carson,” and paused.

There was another oppressive silence. Then the magistrate, who had taken down every word in writing, and had now recovered some degree of calmness, said sternly—

“Your cousin, Mr. Carson, is in England?”

“Yes.”

“And Miss Lisle?”

“Yes.”

“They will be required to corroborate your story.”

“They will do it.”

“Were they aware of your intention to give yourself up?”

“No; they knew nothing of it.”

“Will you please sign this statement, Sir John?”

Jan rose, and bending over the table, signed his name to the document with a firm hand. The magistrate signed it next, and then motioned to his son to do the same. The young fellow had quite broken down, and the tears were rolling down his cheeks; his hand shook so that he could hardly write.

Jan had not seated himself again; he stood waiting. Mr. Van der Riet also rose from his chair.

“It is now my duty, Sir John,” he said coldly, “to place you under arrest.”

“Of course,” said Jan, quietly. He took a letter from his pocket, and held it out to the magistrate. “This is a letter I have written to Mr. Carson,” he said. “Will you be so kind as to see that it reaches him?”

“He shall have it,” said the magistrate, taking it from him.

Jan put his hand into his breast. “Is there anything else,” he said, “that I ought to say to you before I am arrested?”

“I think there is nothing else,” said the magistrate. “You will have every opportunity afforded you of defending yourself on your trial.”

Young Van der Riet had dropped into his chair again, with his elbows leaning on the table, and his face buried in his hands. The magistrate turned aside for a moment to place Jan’s letter in a compartment of his desk and to ring his bell.

Jan drew his hand out of his breast again. The next moment, exactly as the magistrate’s bell sounded, a loud sharp report rang through the room, and a startled cry of horror broke simultaneously from the magistrate and his son.

Sir John Fairbank lay prone on the floor, his dead hand clenching the revolver with which he had put a bullet through his own brain. He had made expiation!

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, two days before Christmas. A tearing south-easter had been blowing all day, and was only now sinking with the sinking sun. The wind, coming off the sea, laden with warm moisture, made everything and every one wet, clammy, and uncomfortable. The monotonous sound of its roaring wearied the air; its gusty and unresting violence wearied still more the limbs and muscles of the unfortunate persons who struggled with it at the street corners, or battled along the sea-wall. With all this commotion, the heat was intense and oppressive.

The mail boat was late, and it was four o'clock before the passengers were landed, in a somewhat dishevelled condition, and with only one idea—to get indoors somewhere as soon as possible, and be at peace.

Mr. Van der Riet, the magistrate, who had waited in his office rather later than usual for the mail, had at length, with great satisfaction, reached his own dwelling, and was sitting very much at ease in a sheltered corner

of his verandah, when his servant brought him a card which bore the name of Mr. Reginald Carson. The magistrate frowned; he did not like to be disturbed at this hour, but he could not possibly refuse to see this visitor, so he went, with a resigned sigh, to interview him in the library. Reginald stood by the window. He was dressed in mourning, and though bronzed by the sea voyage, he looked thin and careworn. As Mr. Van der Riet entered, he came to meet him; and after the first formal greeting had been exchanged, he said—

“I must apologize, Mr. Van der Riet, for coming to you at such an unseasonable hour; but the boat was late, and I did not like to put off my visit till to-morrow.”

“Pray do not mention it,” said Mr. Van der Riet, courteously. “I am quite at your disposal, and understand your anxiety to hear all the details of the late sad event.”

Reginald had nerved himself for this interview; nevertheless he was pale and his lips quivered a little as he took the seat which Mr. Van der Riet offered to him, and entered at once upon the matter in hand.

“Three weeks ago, Mr. Van der Riet,” he began, “I received a cablegram from you informing me that my cousin, Sir John Fairbank, had come to you and made a statement, in which he confessed to being the

murderer of your son, after which he shot himself in your presence." Reginald paused a moment, and moistened his dry lips. "You also said," he continued, "that you had doubts of his sanity, and inquired whether I knew if his statement was true."

"That is so," said the magistrate.

"I immediately replied by cablegram," said Reginald, "that I believed my cousin to be quite in his right mind, that his statement was true, and that I would start by the next mail for the Cape."

"I duly received your reply," said Mr. Van der Riet.

"Will you kindly give me any further particulars?" said Reginald, in a low voice.

"Indeed, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Van der Riet, who saw and compassionated the young man's evident emotion, "I am quite as much perplexed as you can be yourself. I can only conclude that a tardy remorse drove your unhappy cousin to confess, and that fear of public shame induced him to take away his own life before he was arrested for his crime. He came to me—it was on the last day of November—a perfect stranger, introduced himself, and gave me his card. I remembered his father, and also to have heard something of the remarkable way in which he was discovered by you, and his real title and claim to an English baronetcy proved. The story got abroad, and

was talked of a good deal for a short time. He made his terrible confession to me with the utmost calmness and self-possession; nor, I am bound to say, did he express any remorse or any horror of his crime, or give any clue as to his motive in giving himself up to justice. That was why, even while he told his tale, I had some doubts of his sanity; but his deposition was duly taken down, and witnessed by myself and my son. I then informed him that it was my duty to arrest him, to which he assented with the same stoical calmness that he had shown all along. I never saw him take the revolver from his pocket, nor did my son, whose face was hidden in his hands. I turned aside for one moment to touch my bell, and in that one moment he shot himself through the head, and fell dead at my feet."

Reginald caught his breath sharply. The magistrate was himself moved by thus recalling the awful event which had recently occurred under his eyes, and both men were silent for a while.

"At the inquest," Mr. Van der Riet continued presently, "which was held the following day, there was no evidence of any sort forthcoming in support of Sir John's confession. His mother, who is a Kafir woman——"

Reginald bent his head in sign of assent.

“And who was in very great distress, declared that she knew nothing of it, and that she did not believe for a moment that he had ever committed such a crime. The jury would have unhesitatingly returned a verdict of “Suicide whilst of unsound mind,” but that I, remembering that Sir John had told me that you would corroborate his story, requested them to suspend their verdict until I had sent you a cablegram. In the mean time I received information from Messrs. Arkwright and Damer, solicitors, that Sir John had called upon them on the previous morning for the purpose of making his will, on which occasion he appeared to them to be in the perfect possession of his faculties ; and they further informed me that he had expressed his wish, not, as I understood, in the will, but verbally to them, to be buried on his own farm of Bosman’s Kloef. There was no reason why this wish should not be respected ; and as Sir John’s brother, a coloured boy of sixteen, readily undertook to carry out the wish of the deceased, it was accordingly done. The body was conveyed the same day to Bosman’s Kloef, and buried there in the presence of several witnesses.”

“Thank you,” said Reginald, quietly. “I am very glad indeed that that was done.”

“On the following day,” resumed Mr. Van der Riet, “the coroner’s court met again, I having received your

cablegram in the mean time. The jury, of course, had no alternative but to return a verdict of deliberate suicide, committed under the influence of remorse for his crime and dread of public disgrace."

There was another silence. Reginald was struggling for self-command. The magistrate observed and respected his struggle. He rose from his chair, went across the room to his desk, unlocked a compartment, and took thence a letter, which he brought to Reginald.

"Mr. Carson," he said, "this is a letter which your cousin gave into my charge for you. When I knew that you were coming out at once, I kept it, that I might deliver it to you with my own hands."

Reginald took the letter and put it in his breast pocket.

"Thank you, Mr. Van der Riet," he said. "I suppose that these events have made a great stir, and been much talked about?"

"No, not so much as you would think," replied the magistrate. "I must tell you that, for my own sake as well as for that of Sir John's own relatives, I did my utmost to prevent publicity from being given to the affair. The proceedings at the inquest got into two of the papers; but, owing to my exertions, they were briefly given and not commented upon, and the whole matter was suppressed as quickly as possible

by all those concerned. This, I must repeat, was my own wish, as I felt no doubt it would be yours; for the whole thing, as you may suppose, was extremely painful to me. As to the English papers, you need not fear that they will ever get hold of it, and even here it will soon be forgotten."

"You are exceedingly kind, Mr. Van der Riet," said Reginald, earnestly, "and you relieve my mind immensely."

"Believe me, Mr. Carson," said the magistrate, in a tone of great sympathy, "that I feel for your trial very much. It is scarcely, if at all, less than mine; and, bitterly as I felt against your cousin at first, that bitterness has given way to compassion. There were, no doubt, excuses to be made for him; and, at least, he has striven to make some atonement for his deed. I believe that he sacrificed himself in that terrible manner for the very purpose of sparing you and his other relatives the disgrace of a public trial and execution."

"I am sure of it," said Reginald, who was pale with the conflict of his feelings. "Mr. Van der Riet, you have spoken and acted most nobly and generously. Very few men would be so magnanimous. I shall never forget it as long as I live; but I beg you will not think me discourteous if I leave you now."

"I am sure you must be in great need of rest," said Mr. Van der Riet, kindly, "and I will not detain you. But I shall hope to see you again."

"Certainly you shall," said Reginald, and took a hasty leave, for he felt that his powers of self-command were failing him.

He hurried to his hotel, shut himself into his room, drew Jan's last letter from his pocket, and opened it. It was not a very long one.

"DEAR REGINALD" (he said),

"You are the sort of man that makes a fellow do what is right when he least wants to do it. If I had known you sooner, you might have done something with me; but it is too late now. I told you that I would do something hard for you; I told you that I would make expiation. By the time you receive this, I shall have done it.

"I am about to give myself up to justice in the person of Van der Riet, the father of the man I murdered. I shall thus satisfy public justice in the magistrate, and private justice in the father. I could easily make him believe me insane, but I know you are too honest to allow him to remain in that belief. I wish you would.

"I will spare you and myself all the publicity I can.

I will not wait to be publicly condemned and executed. Be satisfied that I pay with my own life for the life that I took away.

“God bless you, Reginald. I loved you sincerely.

“JAN.”

When Reginald had read these lines, he laid his head down on his arms and cried like a little child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHRISTMASTIDE was over, and the New Year had dawned hot and bright and dry on the wide karoo. It was a good season, however, for there had been rains in the latter part of the year, and those who had gardens were already gathering pumpkins and water-melons, and shooting the too numerous birds, who were devouring the fast-ripening grapes and figs.

Christmas was a happy season with the Robertsons. They were a large party in themselves, and in the holidays they always had some boy and girl friends staying with them. Mr. and Mrs. Robertson had a great idea of making the young people about them happy; they promoted and shared all their amusements, and never put any useless obstacles in the way of their enjoyment. Consequently, Brakplaat was a paradise for boys and girls, and holiday-time always found a large and merry party assembled there.

The whole family had been out for a waggon picnic on the last two days of December, and New Year's Day

found them all rather tired and subdued, especially in consideration of the great heat. Work, however, had to be done, in spite of heat and weariness, and May, at least, and her mother had been more or less busy all day. In the evening, when the atmosphere began to cool, they all betook themselves as usual to the stoep; Mrs. Robertson and May making intermittent efforts to do needlework, and the children pervading the whole place, up and down, in and out, to and fro.

"There's some one coming on horseback along the Petrusville road," said one of the boys, coming round the corner of the house.

"A white man?" asked May.

"Yes, I think so; rides too well for a nigger."

"Get the glasses and see who it is," said May.

The boy disappeared, and May forgot all about the man on horseback, when, a few minutes afterwards, Mr. Robertson came on to the stoep and said—

"Here is Mr. Carson coming, Mary."

"Mr. Carson? Oh, I *am* glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Robertson, heartily; and she rose at once, laying aside her work.

May, on the other hand, sat still, and bent over her work a little more closely. For one moment she indulged the exquisite thrill of delight that flashed through her at the sound of that name; the next

moment she felt ashamed, and angry with herself. She laid down her work quickly and decidedly, and followed her mother to the front stoep.

Reginald rode up soon afterwards and dismounted, his face brightening at the sight of the familiar, friendly group assembled to greet him. One among that group, for the sight of whom his soul had been thirsting, made his heart glad within him. He shook hands most cordially with Mr. and Mrs. Robertson, and then turned towards May.

May was by no means self-conscious, and had never been given to imagine that the men she met were in love with her; but there was a look in Reginald's eyes, as he took her hand in his, that no girl, however simple-minded, could mistake. She hardly knew whether she felt glad or frightened. She stumbled over her words of welcome, and brought them to an abrupt close, drawing her hand at the same time gently away from his lingering clasp.

The meeting of these friends was not all joy, however; few meetings are. This one was too sadly fraught with recollections of the past which they had spent together; a past which, with all its anxieties and trials, was bright and peaceful in comparison with the days of terrible tragedy just gone by.

"Well, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Robertson, expressing

this feeling which they all shared, "I need not say how glad we are to see you, and how heartily welcome you are here; nor, on the other hand, how truly we grieve for the occasion which has brought you to this country again."

"It has been a stormy time indeed," said Reginald, referring in his own mind to the whole of the last three months; "but here, at least, I find a happy haven."

He spoke to Mr. Robertson, but he looked at May; and he said no more just then, for the next moment he was overwhelmed, devoured, and completely swallowed up by the whole tribe of youngsters, who hung and jumped and pranced around him with vociferous delight, till his welcome quite bewildered him.

"That will do, children," said Mrs. Robertson, interposing after a while. "We are all delighted to see Mr. Carson, but we must remember that he has had a long journey, and is tired. Come inside, Mr. Carson. You are just in time for supper, and your old room will be ready for you in a few minutes."

Reginald could never imagine how the Robertsons and their various guests stowed themselves away in a house which was not a fifth part the size of his own; but he observed that they always managed it somehow. With a delightful feeling of rest and home, and things familiar and dear surrounding him, he at once resumed

his old place in the family circle as if he had never been away. He had brought some small presents for the children from Lisbon and Madeira, where the vessel had called on the voyage.

"I would have brought you all something really nice from home," he said, "only I came away in such a hurry. I scarcely had time to bring anything but myself."

"We don't want anything but yourself," said one of the younger girls ; and her remark called forth a chorus of approval from the rest, and a laughing acknowledgment from Reginald which made her happy for the rest of the evening. After that they all went to supper ; and after supper, as it was a warm, still night, they all went outside and sat on the stoep in the starlight.

"I can scarcely believe," said Reginald, "that it is only nine months since we all sat round the fire together. It seems so long ago."

"It has been a very eventful year for you, Mr. Carson," observed Mrs. Robertson.

"It has been a lifetime," replied Reginald. It was too dark for him to see May's face clearly now, but he had placed his chair next to hers.

After a short pause, Mrs. Robertson spoke again. "Would you like to tell us about your cousin?" she said gently ; "or would you rather not speak of him?"

"I quite intended to tell you about him," said Reginald, readily; "and I like to do so. Only, as it is not a story for children's ears, I was waiting till they were gone."

"They are all gone to bed now," said May.

The two elder boys from Petrusville were both there, as it was a Saturday evening, and they, with their parents and May, formed the interested audience to whom Reginald told his narrative.

It was not a complete narrative, however, that he gave them. Reginald was very deeply impressed by Jan's utter devotion to himself, which had been his sole motive in giving himself up to justice, and also in his last mistaken and fatal act of sacrifice. For this reason the young fellow was intensely loyal to his cousin's memory; and he was resolved to tell, even to these his intimate friends, only so much as was necessary to explain and complete what they already knew. They had read the brief account of the inquest in the papers, and knew, therefore, of Jan's crime, but not of the motive for it.

Reginald, thinking only of what was due to his cousin, and not at all of his own part in the matter, first related the story of Jan's engagement to Miss Lisle, his blind passion for a girl who was in no way worthy of him, and the desperate state to which she had driven

him. It must be owned that he was scarcely fair to Miss Lisle, whom he heartily disliked, and that he thoroughly enlisted his hearers' sympathies on his cousin's behalf. When he came to the English part of his narrative, he related how Jan had met Miss Lisle again, and had been as much infatuated with her as before; he dwelt on Miss Lisle's heartless and deceitful conduct in leading on two men at the same time and in the same place, but he entirely passed over Jan's attempt to shoot her, and merely said that when his cousin discovered how Miss Lisle was trifling with him, while engaged to another man, he was in a desperate mood, and in a long conversation with himself (Reginald) had finally been led on to confess the murder of Van der Riet.

Reginald did not say that he had known, or at least suspected, his cousin's crime long before—that seemed to him unnecessary; neither did he say what strenuous efforts he had made to win his cousin to a better mind. He dwelt lightly on his own part throughout; but he laid great stress on the noble, if perverted, idea of sacrifice, which had finally become the leading motive in that passionate, misguided nature.

In spite of all that he suppressed, Reginald told his story well; and when he had finished, there was a long silence, which May was the first to break.

“What a very strange thing,” she said in a low voice, “that you should have been the one to discover that poor man’s body ! ”

“It is more than strange,” replied Reginald ; “it seems to me quite a terrible coincidence.”

His remark was followed by another silence, and then he spoke again.

“Mr. Robertson,” he said, “there is something I want you to do for me.”

“With pleasure, Mr. Carson,” replied his host.

“I want you one day, when you are at liberty, to drive me over to Bosman’s Kloef.”

“Of course I will ; I was going to ask you which day you would like to go. To-morrow ? ”

“No,” said Reginald ; “I know that you do not drive on Sundays, as a rule, and I do not wish you to break your rule for me. Any day next week will do. I assure you,” he added smiling, “that you will have to put up with me for some time, for I do not mean to hurry away.”

“If you did mean to hurry away, we should not let you do it—that’s one thing,” put in Harold.

“I should think not,” said Mr. Robertson. “I suppose you will not be going home again immediately ? ”

“I think not immediately,” said Reginald, with some hesitation.

"You have your cousin's affairs to arrange out here, I suppose?" said Harold.

"Well," replied Reginald, "as sole executor of his will, I have some formalities to go through; but I have really nothing to do with his property out here. He has left his farm to his eldest brother, Mbangwe, and has made a fair provision for the other children."

"And his mother?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"She was already provided for by my uncle," said Reginald. "She has all she wants; and what is the use of giving her more?"

"That is true," said Mrs. Robertson. "I suppose you went to see her?"

"Yes, the day after I landed," said Reginald. "Poor woman, I felt very, very sorry for her. She was quite overcome at seeing me, yet it seemed to give her pleasure too. All the children were in equal distress. Jan was very good to his family, and they were passionately fond of him."

"Well, that is a good trait in his character, too," said Mr. Robertson. "A man who is beloved in his home always has a lot of good in him. I must tell you, Mr. Carson, that I was able to attend your cousin's funeral. I heard of it just in time."

"I am very glad of that," said Reginald, earnestly. "I have been wondering whether by any chance you

were there. It hurt me to think that he should be put out of sight in such a hurried and secret manner, with no friend near him."

"Of course, it was a very quiet and simple funeral," said Mr. Robertson. "His two brothers were there, and a few coloured people belonging to the place. Mr. Van Heerden, who has been looking after the farm, and myself, were the only white men present. There was no one, I am sorry to say, to read any kind of a service, so I said a prayer over the grave myself."

"That was indeed kind of you, Mr. Robertson," said Reginald, warmly. "I shall always be grateful to you for that. I should have felt even more grieved than I do at not being able to be there myself, had you not been there to take my place. Whereabouts is the grave?"

"Not far from the homestead," replied Mr. Robertson; "in that little open hollow at the back. I will take you there on Monday."

On the Monday afternoon, accordingly, Mr. Robertson and Reginald drove over to Bosman's Kloof, May and two of the boys accompanying them on horseback. The road thither, and the familiar aspect of the place when they reached it, brought so many painful recollections to Reginald's mind, that the visit was a very trying one for him. May noticed his pale face and

compressed lips, and her heart ached with sympathy for him. They called at the house, and were hospitably received by Mr. Van Heerden, who was still in charge. Reginald looked round the familiar rooms, and he felt the same tightening of the heart that Jan himself had felt when he paid that midnight visit to his home, of which no living soul ever knew or ever would know.

The little party went together to the solitary grave. It was in just such a place as Jan himself would have chosen—out in the wide, open veldt, with Nature, in her primitive forms, all around, with the fierce sun beating on it by day, and the pitying eyes of the stars looking down on it by night. Here lay that passionate heart at rest, its fires extinct, itself crumbling into indistinguishable dust. Reginald stood there long and silently, gazing on the bare, freshly-made mound, with eyes that filled with tears, of which he was not ashamed. In all his life to come, he thought, he should never meet with another man who would love him as this one had done.

When at last he turned away, May said softly, “You will put a stone here, Mr. Carson?”

“Yes, Miss Robertson,” replied Reginald; “a very simple one. I have already ordered it.”

“What will the inscription be?” she asked.

“ Just this : ‘ In memory of John Fairbank, baronet, of Sedgwick Manor, England. Born June 5, 18—. Laid down his life November 30, 18—. ’ ”

“ I like that very much,” said May.

After that they drove home very silently.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

YOUTH has a well-filled store of new-born hopes and joy in life which, in a healthy nature, never fails. It knows not the monotonous patience, the quiescent resignation of middle age. So it was that, in spite of all the sad past, in spite of great nervous and emotional strain, Reginald began to feel very happy. He was young and strong, in easy circumstances, with the best of life before him; he enjoyed the daily society of a woman whom he loved freshly and ardently, and he was not without good hope that she returned his love. For Reginald, having come to Brakplaat with a definite purpose in view, saw no reason for concealing that purpose.

When Mr. Robertson started on his early rounds in the morning, he was joined by Reginald. After a few minutes' conversation, he went straight to the point, as was his wont.

"Mr. Robertson," he began, "I have a very great favour to ask of you. I dare say you know what it is."

"Perhaps I do," said Mr. Robertson, rather dryly; "but you can tell me all the same."

"I want your permission, and Mrs. Robertson's, to ask your daughter to be my wife."

"We have expected this, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Robertson, kindly, "and I see no reason for keeping you in suspense. Provided, of course, that May herself is willing, Mrs. Robertson and myself give a ready consent."

They walked a little way in silence, and then Reginald said—

"I must tell you, Mr. Robertson, that I am, comparatively speaking, a rich man. My cousin has left me, by his will, all the English property unreservedly. It is quite unencumbered, and it will be a great happiness to me to give your daughter—if she will accept it—everything that she can wish for in her home."

"I am very glad of what you tell me, Mr. Carson," said Mr. Robertson; "not so much for May's sake, although I don't pretend to despise the good things of this world, and am heartily glad that she should have them, but for your own sake, because I know how much attached you are to your home, and we have always felt that it would be only just and right that it should belong to you. It would have been a real

misfortune if it had been left to that coloured boy, his brother."

"He would never have cared to live there, or have understood the management of it," said Reginald; "at least, I think not. If he and the others had not been provided for, I should certainly have felt bound to provide for them myself; but as they are really well provided for, and have everything they can possibly need, and as they themselves are quite content, I can enjoy my possessions without any qualms of conscience. I certainly am pleased to have Sedgwick, because it has always been my home, and I love it as I could never love any other spot on earth; and if only Miss Robertson will share it with me, I think it will be the happiest home in England."

Mr. Robertson smiled at this outspoken expression of feeling, but he turned and held out his hand to the young man.

Reginald was determined to learn his fate that day; but although it was an easy enough matter to find May, it was not so easy to find her alone. There were so many children, and they were everywhere. They never had any idea that they were not wanted, and they always turned up at the most inconvenient times and places. However, Reginald was not to be baffled. He persuaded May to go for a ride in

the evening; and though, as a matter of course, several of the youngsters must go too, their one idea of riding was to tear along as hard as they could go, and race each other the whole way; so that Reginald had no difficulty in keeping himself and May a good way behind.

At first they talked of things indifferent; but when the tail of the last horse had vanished, flying round a curve of the road, silence fell between them, and May felt that Reginald was looking at her, though she was looking quite the other way, and she wished she had stayed at home, though she felt happy all the time.

They were walking quite slowly, and Reginald edged his horse as near to hers as he could.

"Miss Robertson," he said, with all his soul in his eager grey eyes, "will you listen to me? I think you must know what I want to tell you. I have loved you ever since I was last here, and I feel that my life can never be complete now without you. Will you be my wife?"

And May, who knew that she loved him, and saw no reason for making any pretence of hesitation, answered simply and directly—

"If I could really make you happy, Mr. Carson, I think I should like it very much."

"You make me happy now by saying so," he said,

smiling brightly, and stretching out his hand to lay it on hers. "May, I have thought of you so much all these months, and I often feared I should never see you again."

"Why should you think that?" she asked in some surprise.

"Because I thought that Jan would leave me in charge of Sedgwick, and I should be completely tied. You see, when I was out here before, I was so taken up with other things, that I actually never knew that I loved you until that last day when I came here to say good-bye to you. Of course, I could not speak then; and when I went home I thought it probable that I might not have the chance of coming out to this country again."

"You could have written," suggested May, rather shyly.

"Yes, and I thought of doing so once or twice; but, you see, I did not suppose for a moment then that you had the least idea of caring about me; I thought my only hope was to come out again and see you, and try if I could win you. If I had written, May, what would you have answered me?"

"I don't know, Mr. Carson," said May, hesitating. "I know," she added, blushing, "that I missed you very much when you went away; but I don't think I

should have been quite sure what to say if I had not seen you again."

When the event of the day was announced to the assembled family that evening, it was received at first with unmixed satisfaction. Reginald was an immense favourite with the youngsters, and to have him for a brother seemed to them quite a providential arrangement; but when they realized that he was going to take May quite away to live in England, their faces fell, and they did not feel quite so kindly disposed towards him. Life at Brakplaat without May seemed hardly imaginable; and it was only when Reginald rashly promised that they should all come and stay with him in England that they began to take comfort.

"I am afraid I shall be very stupid and ignorant about English ways at first," sighed May. "I do hope your mother will always live at Sedgwick, Reginald, and then she will help me. Besides, I could not bear for her to leave her home."

"I have no doubt we can persuade her to remain there," said Reginald, "though I dare say she will wish to live in her own rooms. But you will soon fit into English life, May, and will find it a happy life, too, I hope."

"Of course I shall, with you," she said shyly; "only I feel quite frightened to think of having that large

house, and being such an important person. Reginald," she added suddenly, "is the title yours, too, now? Are you Sir Reginald Carson?"

"No fear," said Reginald. "The title goes in the direct line, and cannot be left by will, like the property. So you need not flatter yourself, Miss Robertson, that you are going to be Lady Carson, because you will only be Mrs. Reginald Carson."

"Oh, I never thought about that," said May, laughing; "and I am sure I would much rather not be Lady Anything. But is the title extinct, then?"

"No," replied Reginald; "because the line is not extinct. Jan's next brother is now the eldest surviving son of my uncle. Consequently, the title comes to him, and he is, properly speaking, Sir Mbangwe Fairbank."

As Reginald stumbled over this uncouth combination, the anti-climax proved too much for them, and they both burst out laughing.

"Did you tell him?" asked May.

"Yes, I told him; but he hardly seemed to take it in. I don't suppose he will ever use his title."

"No," said May; "and he will forget about it very likely by the time he has a son, and it will lapse."

"Practically, yes," said Reginald; "and no harm done either. A 'sir' more or less in the world is not of much consequence."

“It almost seems now,” said May, gravely, “as if it would have been better for poor Jan never to have known it. He might have lived on contentedly as a farmer, and in the end have forgotten Miss Lisle, and married some girl who would have been a good wife to him.”

“He would have hidden his parentage from any white girl,” said Reginald. “No, I fear that Jan was not adapted for happiness; he was too much carried away by his passions. However, we do not order these things, and my only real regret for the past is that I could not save him.”

“You did all you could,” said May, gently; “and I think we may be quite sure that, although it was wrong to take away his own life, he did it because he thought it was right.”

“He did it for my sake,” said Reginald, “and I can never forget it.”

* * * * *

What more need now be said? Reginald had won his bride, and in her English home she met with a mother's welcome. Such happiness as mortals may aspire to was given to them; such trials as all must share mingled in their lot; but in cloudy days and in sunshine alike, they had the best of gifts, which is love.

The Sinclairs did not stay long at Framleigh. They

left it at the end of a year, and went to live in Moxton. Miss Lisle became Mrs. Nasmyth of Birmingham, and a leader of fashion in that important centre. She was greatly shocked when she heard of the sad end of Sir John Fairbank, but she found in it matter for self-congratulation that she had escaped an alliance with so dangerous and wicked a man. She lost sight of the Carsons, who no longer desired her acquaintance; and she became rather too grand for the Sinclairs, and gradually dropped them.

Jan's crime was never known to his English friends. His suicide was accounted for by his unhappy passion for Miss Lisle, and his despair at losing her. If Mr. Bennett had some other thoughts about the gun that went off that night, he never put them into words. By his tenants, though he lived among them for so short a time, he was sincerely regretted. They knew nothing but good of him; for Reginald and his wife and mother kept the secret, that was known only to them, closely locked in their own breasts.

And though all that was left of Jan was that solitary grave in the veldt, far away from his fair English home, across six thousand miles of ocean, yet he lived, a sacred treasure, in the hearts of those to whom he had been faithful. They never ceased to love him; but through all the years of their lives, in summer suns and

winter frosts, in the bright noonday of youth and the serene evening of age, in many an hour of silent thought, or of sweet and intimate communion, they kept his memory green.

THE END.

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